PERCY FITZGERALD

THE KEMBLES

Volume One

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Mrs. Siddons in the character of the Tragic Muse

THE KEMBLES

AN ACCOUNT OF THE KEMBLE FAMILY,

INCLUDING THE LIVES OF

MRS. SIDDONS,

AND HER BROTHER

JOHN PHILIP KEMBLE.

BY

PERCY FITZGERALD, M.A., F.S.A.

AUTHOR OF "THE LIFE OF GARRICK," "PRINCIPLES OF COMEDY," ETC.

IN TWO VOLUMES.

VOL. I.

LONDON:

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TO

E. A. SOTHERN, Esq.

My dear Sothern,

It is with great pleasure that I inscribe to you the following history of two great lights of the English Stage, both as a token of personal regard and as a cordial admirer of your many talents.

PERCY FITZGERALD.

PREFACE.

WITH a Biography of JOHN PHILIP KEMBLE, and no less than two accounts of Mrs. SIDDONS's career, already in existence, it might seem that any fresh attempt to describe the lives and adventures of these great artists would scarcely be called for. But what has been done in this direction was found unsatisfactory by the public, to whom those accounts were presented; and though the present writer's attempt may not be admitted as either final or sufficient, he ventures to hope that he will be found to have contributed a fuller and more authentic dramatic history than either of his predecessors.

Boaden's two works are professedly a contribution to the history of the great London theatres.

Kemble and his sister figure there only incidentally: about two-thirds of each volume being filled with accounts of new plays, of their writers, of the *débuts* of new actors, and of subjects so little *àpropos* as the opening of a new room at Coutts's Bank, and the Festival at Westminster Abbey. His account of Mrs. Siddons is meagre to a degree, which may be explained by the fact that it was published during her life. Though he was intimately acquainted with both brother and sister, he seems either to have obtained little knowledge of their life, or to have been cautious in making use of whatever was communicated to him. The substantial and valuable portions of his work are the detailed criticisms on the performances of the two great artists, which are acute and graphic. He has, besides, told but little of their private history, which, in Mrs. Siddons's instance, at least, was really interesting, and almost adventurous. His style, too, is singularly infelicitous, being inflated and ponderous to a degree that now seems ludicrous. At the same time, I have made free use of his volumes,

and acknowledge many obligations to his labour and industry.

Thomas Campbell, the poet, for many years a warm admirer of Mrs. Siddons, was specially enjoined by her to write her life. During her latter years he was one of her most intimate friends, and on her death all her correspondence and private papers, with a Diary of singular interest, was placed in his hands. He entered on the work with some enthusiasm, but soon began to flag, and at last seems to have found it a piece of wearisome taskwork. When it appeared it was universally admitted to be a failure. Much of it was done by deputy, and he seems to have received great assistance from Mr. Winston, of the Garrick Club, whose notes are now in my possession, and which Campbell has copied almost literally. But the most extraordinary blemish was the meagreness of the account. He made but little use of the vast quantity of papers intrusted to him, gave merely a few extracts from the characteristic Diary, and suppressed nearly all the letters, from which might at least have been

gleaned many interesting incidents or illustrations of character. The impartial reader will own, from the specimens presented to him on the following pages, that Mrs. Siddons's style was singularly natural and engaging, and that when she wrote she opened her heart to her friends with a *naïveté* and freedom that is charming; yet, with these documents before him, which would have helped to fill spaces in her life which he has left blank, he preferred to go out of his way to deal with matters which have only the remotest connexion with his subject. A reviewer in the *Gentleman's Magazine* had looked over these papers, and pronounced them of the highest interest and importance. The only excuse Campbell gives for not availing himself of such advantages is the following:—"Hundreds of her letters have been submitted to me, and though her correspondence has disappointed me in being less available than I could have wished for quotation, yet, in one respect, it delighted me by the proof which it gave of her endearing domestic character."

Believing that these papers would be "available for quotation," like most of her printed letters, I applied to Mr. Cox, of Edinburgh, Mrs. Siddons's grandson, and received from him the unwelcome news that the poet had not merely made no use of what was intrusted to him, but had unfortunately prevented others doing so.

Mr. Cox's letter gives a very clear account of the transaction, and I therefore insert it here :—

"In reply to your inquiry as to what became of the MSS. of Mrs. Siddons, which were lent by her daughter, Mrs. Combe, to Campbell, the poet, I am able to state that they were never returned to her, either by him or by his executors. She concluded that he had lost them, or carelessly allowed them to be stolen or destroyed.

"I am her nephew by marriage (Mr. Combe having been my uncle), and am also an executor of each, and have the custody of their private papers. The delay in replying to your letter has arisen from my wish to look among her papers and see whether they include any statement by herself about those MSS.

The search has resulted in the finding of a copy of an article inserted, soon after Mr. Campbell's death, in the *Scotsman* of 31st August, 1844, which I know to have been written by Mr. Combe from information given by her, and in which it is stated that when she despaired of Campbell's 'Life' of her mother ever appearing, 'she made an application for the return of the manuscript (a memoir) in her mother's handwriting. This request was unceremoniously answered in the negative; and she has never received it, or any of her mother's other papers, to the present day.'

"Possibly the article in the *Scotsman* was copied soon afterwards into the *Literary Gazette;* as it was called forth by a communication of Mr. Dyce's, published in that journal, in which it was stated that Campbell had been indignant at Mrs. Combe for patronizing a proposed Life of Mrs. Siddons, by Mrs. Jameson, though she knew that *he* had been appointed the biographer. The explanation was, that Mrs. Jameson, apparently thinking that Campbell would

never write the Life, wrote to Mrs. Combe, 'asking her whether, *in the event of Mr. Campbell's relinquishing the materials to her,* she should have her sanction in going forward with the work. Miss S. lost no time in replying in the affirmative, and most willingly promised her all the little assistance in her power. Mrs. J. did not mention what communication she had held with Mr. Campbell; but, as the condition of her procuring the materials necessarily implied her obtaining his consent, Miss S. could not possibly, in assenting to her request, have contemplated giving offence to Mr. Campbell,' &c.

"Had the papers ever been returned to her after the 31st August, 1844, I could not but have become aware of the fact, as I was in frequent and familiar intercourse with her and her husband till their deaths; and I know that they were not found in her repositories after her decease."

Mr. Cyrus Redding, in his "Fifty Years' Recollections," gives an account of Campbell's *ennui* and almost disgust as he toiled through the wearisome

task. It seemed to weigh on him like a nightmare; but he laboured on, and, to secure himself against interruption, would fix a placard on the door of his chambers, announcing that Mr. Campbell was engaged with the biography of Mrs. Siddons, and was not to be disturbed. A work written under such conditions must have, at least, been wanting in spirit and enthusiasm. Indeed, it is hard to recognise the agreeable editor of the "Specimens of British Poetry" in the singular style of the biographer of Mrs. Siddons, the extraordinary inflation of the language reaching nearly to the grotesque. These oddities caused not a little surprise when the book came out, and the following, which are chosen almost at random, may be accepted as fair samples:—"The company was for some time *shaken with uproar;*" "borrow a debt from elocution;" "sound the very bass-string of humility;" "he-creatures;" "make the hair of our literary faith stand on end;" "encrusted with ignorance as she was, she was still a diamond;" "at the same time she must have been

unequal in her appearances;" "she electrified the Irish with disappointment;" "this chain-shot satire;" "the artificers of calumny;" "Shakspeare, who alone knew how to dip their motley coats in the hues of immortality." Even more singular are the reflections on the stage; the accounts of plays and actors, given in a half-jocular fashion; the extraordinary metaphors, the grave tone where he finds it necessary to reprehend, and which reads like burlesque. He has at times an air of mystery, which is highly comic, as where he speaks of Mrs. Siddons's nerves, "which were of the most delicate texture. *By looking at the note appended to p.* 34, it will be seen that her health could not *now* be very robust." On turning to the page, we find a notice of the birth of her son! There are also lengthy disquisitions on the remote history of the stage, where it is clear from the notes now before me that the poet had been "coached" for the purpose in hand, and with which he had previously little acquaintance.

This, then, constitutes a fair apology for making

yet one more attempt to tell the story of these two gifted artists. Since Campbell and Boaden wrote, great stores of new material have come to light—theatrical memoirs, diaries, histories, recollections in profusion. Collecting all that seemed material from these sources, I found that the interest in Mrs. Siddons would centre not so much in her dramatic life as in the story of her own adventures and struggles, her difficulties and trials, her friendships and social existence, all of which make up a woman's history of singular attraction. That of her brother has far less dramatic interest, and it will be seen that his life can be dealt with as part of hers with far more effect than if it had been related separately. The lives of the other Kembles, Charles and Stephen, with that of the various members of the family, had nothing dramatic or interesting to the reader to recommend them. From a few persons I have received some family recollections of the great actress, and from one or two some stray personal recollections. I have to own obligations to Mr. Cox, of Edinburgh, Mrs. Siddons's

grandson, who has furnished much information as to the genealogical branch of the subject, as also to the representative of the late "Conversation" Sharpe. Mr. Harvey, of St. James's Street, whose name is well-known to the "curious" and to amateurs, has formed a most important collection of materials for Kemble's life, which fills eight sumptuous volumes. Here is gathered every print and portrait, and every pamphlet and caricature, with autograph letters of the actor, as well as of his friends—all, in short, that could pleasantly illustrate his career. These I have been allowed to look over. Even from these volumes may be gathered proofs of how dignified an actor's calling was fifty years ago; for we here find some forty or fifty different portraits of this great player—the finest engravings after the finest painters—of all sizes and shapes. It is thus that one great art acts upon another. Fine acting produces fine expression, and offers irresistible temptation to the great painter.

I have also to return my thanks for assistance

to his Grace the Duke of Abercorn, with whose grandfather, the Marquis of Abercorn, Kemble was on intimate terms; to Mr. E. Harcourt, of Nuneham, who has kindly placed at my disposal Lord and Lady Harcourt's correspondence with Mrs. Siddons, and many more. Nor must I leave unacknowledged the great help I have received from Dr. Doran's account of the Kemble family, in his "History of the English Stage," where he has gathered all the important facts in their lives.

I have also made use of the many letters in Dr. Whalley's Memoirs, as well as of the interesting Bate letters, to be found in the Ad. MSS. of the British Museum, and which are given at the end of the first Volume of this work. Books on theatrical life are specially liable to errors, from the vast number of facts and dates introduced in every page; and I can hardly hope that the present work will be found an exception. I may call attention to two "slips," which the reader is asked to correct: one at page 43 of vol. i., when Mr. Tom Taylor's name has been put for that

of Mr. John Taylor; another at page 40, line 9, where the year 1776 has been omitted.

In conclusion, I may add that another purpose has been kept in view all through the narrative—viz., that of dwelling on such points as seem to have been the cause of the former flourishing state of the Stage, as well as on the abuses which have led to the later unfortunate decay. The whole, I trust, will be found to have been executed in an impartial and appreciative spirit.

CONTENTS

OF

THE FIRST VOLUME.

CHAP.		PAGE
I.	THE STROLLERS	1
II.	ROGER KEMBLE'S COMPANY	11
III.	MISS SARAH KEMBLE'S MARRIAGE	26
IV.	MRS. SIDDONS' LONDON ENGAGEMENT	45
V.	FAILURE	56
VI.	ON "THE CIRCUIT"	68
VII.	THE BATH THEATRE	83
VIII.	A NIGHT OF TRIUMPH	100
IX.	LONDON HOMAGE	109
X.	SUCCESS AT DUBLIN	127
XI.	KEMBLE'S FIRST APPEARANCE IN LONDON	149
XII.	SOCIAL HOMAGE	162
XIII.	EDINBURGH	179
XIV.	TROUBLES AT DUBLIN	188

CHAP. PAGE

XV. UNPOPULARITY 197

XVI. RESTORED TO FAVOUR 208

XVII. MACBETH 225

XVIII. DOMESTIC EVENTS 256

XIX. KEMBLE MANAGER 276

XX. SHERIDAN AND "NEW DRURY LANE" 298

XXI. THE GERMAN DRAMA 320

APPENDIX 348

ERRATA.

Vol. i. p. 38, note, *for* "178–" *read* "1784.

„ p. 43, line 13, *for* "Tom" *read* "John."

„ p. 256, line 5, *for* "had" *read* "has."

ILLUSTRATIONS.

VOL. I.

Mrs. Siddons as "The Tragic Muse," after Sir Joshua Reynolds . . . . . *Frontispiece*

Roger Kemble . . . . . Page 12

Mrs. Roger Kemble . . . . . „ 24

Caricature of Mrs. Siddons as "Melpomene" . . „ 176

Mrs. Siddons as "Lady Macbeth" . . . . „ 242

Mrs. Siddons at the age of thirty . . . . „ 256

Drawing of T. P. Kemble, after Lawrence . . . „ 298

Autographs of the Kemble family . . . . „ 320

VOL II.

John P. Kemble, after Sir M. Shee . . . *Frontispiece*

As "Penruddock" . . . . . Page 4

Fac-Simile Letters of Mrs. Siddons and Charles Kemble „ 30

Charles Kemble . . . . . „ 78

Stephen Kemble as "Falstaff" . . . . „ 108

Caricature of the Kemble Family . . . . „ 114

Ticket for Farewell Dinner to Kemble . . . „ 263

THE KEMBLES.

CHAPTER I.

THE STROLLERS.

THERE are, perhaps, no English Players of mark who seem so lifted above the undignified associations of their profession as John Kemble and his sister, the gifted Siddons, whose career we are about to pursue. In the life of Garrick there was a certain adventure and even romance. His power to win laughter as well as to draw tears, and his quick French vivacity, created a sympathy and easy familiarity, while the wilder career of Kean, with his impetuous acting, seemed to prove that genius on the stage had but too many of the human frailties found in the boxes and in the pit. But a sort of classic grandeur, with a demeanour that in the distance might be counted majestic, appeared to place the Kembles on the steps of a classic temple: the ancient draperies of Greece and Rome covered their stately persons, while their

speech, gait, and bearing were all in harmony. Standing on a distant and sacred eminence, these two great artists were regarded with a species of sacred awe which checked familiarity, and which is, in truth, one of the important elements of histrionic effect. But, on the other hand, there is the disadvantage—that this tone must insensibly colour any narrative of their career, which, though highly interesting, will lack the delightful and intoxicating alternations which made the story of their predecessors' lives more exciting than a romance. Yet there is something almost piquant in the notion, that so majestic a career should find its starting-point among the squalid associations of the strolling players and the booth, and the haughty Kemble eyes must have often turned away uncomfortable from what in the last century was the most complete and fatal leveller of theatrical dignity and self-respect. The strolling player, with his *entourage*, and the incidents of his life, makes an epitome of all that is degraded and contemptible. He lived in terror of the law, and might be put lower in the scale than the unhappy tramps who now infest race-courses, whose elements of entertainment consist in a stool and leathern strap, or a clumsy wheel, with a rudely-painted piece

of oil-cloth. The shifts, meannesses, and pretences of this unhappy pariah seem to have been a perpetual invitation to satirists, even of such rank as Scarron, Churchill, and Hogarth, who exhausted their most pitiless raillery on victims who might appear to us scarcely worthy of their notice. But the truth is, poverty and pretence, shabbiness and finery, found in company, make up what has been called "snobbery;" in short, have been always the game a satirist loves to hunt down—the unclean bird which he nails against his barn-door. So harsh a view is more than justified; for the mere vulgar accessories of rant and frippery, with the brief assumption of say regal rank or historical character, by poor wretches, barely tolerated for the night in their barn, and hunted from the parish in the morning by terror of the stocks, is a spectacle to excite bitter contempt and laughter. These miserable incidents have nothing to do with real dramatic genius, though the crowd, in our day more than ever, have always insisted on confounding with it the cheap and tawdry accidents that help to set it off. Happily, the magnificent gifts of a true actor can make the barn and its earthen floor pass away, his poor robes be forgotten, and soften the frowns of the dullest Justice that ever made the

county bench ridiculous. What in that day made the profession so contemptible is now causing the present decay of the stage, only now the corruption of the audience protects the "stroller" from the old inconvenient disabilities. Gaudy theatres, sumptuous scenery and dresses, may have indeed taken the place of barns and makeshifts; but in the estimation of future judges, English players will be found to have sunk to a position almost as low as that of strollers in their old days of degradation.

From the old theatrical memoirs, whose abundance shows how great was the interest felt in the stage, it would be interesting to show how this legal oppression of what seemed a harmless class, whose aim was the amusement of the community, could be traced to the self-abasement of the members of the profession. The harsh Acts of Parliament of George II., which at the present moment are doing so much mischief by being distorted to the purposes of monopoly, were intended to deal with the bands of wanderers and mountebanks who were found as troublesome to the good order and police of a parish as gipsies and tramps. The company of strollers would arrive at a village without money, and scarcely any means to support themselves. Some coach-house or barn, or, in

rare cases, a room at the inn, was lent to them; or, in more remote days, the open inn-yard, with its antique galleries running round, became a convenient theatre, and, indeed, was said to have furnished the present model for the playhouse. All sorts of odds and ends were borrowed to make a show; a few wretched candles were stuck round, and thus the performance took place. The result was generally a number of small debts for lodging and board, or hopeless insolvency, with a flight by night. This catastrophe angry landladies sometimes anticipated by seizing some wretched articles of clothing while the owner lay in bed; and the spectacle of the player flying from the house, some old rags about him, was likely to add to the "stock" ridicule against his caste. Sometimes their miserable stage-poor properties were laid hold of and forfeited. There were generally pleasant, jovial creatures amongst them, who, in return for a supper or pot of ale, told their adventures, and disturbed the heads of the simple lads of the village by vaunting the glories of the stage. Sometimes there were quarrels, and the whole place was thrown into confusion by some tipsy Hamlet or Lothario, who had run away from a squire's house, and fancied himself still a gentleman and entitled to respect.

One of these vagrants, Ryley by name, has written a strange incoherent account of this sort of life, that spreads over nine volumes. A most degrading record it is: a few facts, seasoned with a prodigious deal of buffoonery. We here see the strollers, after a disastrous week, quitting the town on credit, having found indulgent tradesmen, and being actually "trusted" for the chaises which took them away. But this was a rare humanity. We see "Mrs. Long" on the eve of a "bespeak" dressing up her *eight* children in scarlet, and taking them round to distribute bills, with the most successful result. The "bespeak" system, with the respectful waiting on patrons, obtained to our own time, as we learn from Nickleby; and Wilkinson describes the genteel actor, panting eagerly along the road after the mounted gentleman, and forcing play-bills on him.

Often, too, a young girl falling in love with this fleeting Romeo caused a scandal—servants became demoralized, property was missed (as in the case of gipsy visits); in short, these theatrical visitors were considered as mountebanks, plagues, and nuisances by the justices—who thus classed the interpreters of the drama with the tramps and vagrants who gave them so much trouble. Even in London, the simple

turning of a "throwster's" warehouse into a theatrical saloon was described as at once causing bagnios and other "houses" to spring up all round in unwholesome luxuriance, and as demoralizing the whole quarter;* so it is hardly surprising that in the country the strolling visitors should be sternly dealt with by the rigid Puritans of the bench. When, therefore, the increasing bands of showmen, hawkers, mountebanks, tumblers, and "bear-wards," wandered over the kingdom, between whom and beggars it was scarcely possible to draw any distinction, it was not surprising that strolling players should be included in the Act under the title "Vagrant." This, though it seems an everlasting stigma on the profession, does not, in truth, touch the pure drama, which would have too much dignity to exhibit itself under such degrading conditions. On this ground alone, it might seem desirable that some shape of State license or restriction should exist for the stage, if only to save it from the "vagabondage," which the liberty of playing everywhere, and under every condition, would certainly entail.

A harlequin and player, Lee Lewes, exhibits to

* Sir J. Hawkins.

us—with that unconsciousness of humiliation which belongs only to the profession—many grotesque scenes from the life of the stroller; as does also the incoherent, but graphic Tate Wilkinson. In their pages we see the "Priest of the Sun" stride forward, a borrowed bed-curtain draped about him, a deal box for his altar; or the player, performing in "Mr. Coote's Malthouse," finds his boot sink in the soft clay as he declaims, and must leave it there. But what befel Elrington, an Irish actor of some mark, is more significant. Opening a small theatre at Manchester, he proposed conciliating all voices by a proclamation that the first receipts were to be given over to a new hospital. On this, he and his troupe were dragged before the justices, and *chassèd* from the town forthwith, for daring "to insult the subscribers to that institution." And one pleasant member of the Kemble family used to tell how, when walking with the provincial mayor of an Irish town, he was puzzled by some persons, who persisted in bowing repeatedly, in a fashion that seemed almost like prostration, before the functionary, who took no notice whatever. At the next street they found the same sycophants waiting, who again ran on and repeated their salaams, until the mayor at last said,

indulgently, "I see you—I see you!" These were the strollers.

Long after, John and Stephen Kemble were fond of recalling the grotesque incidents of this early probation. With a grim humour, John would tell of that highly critical stroller, who took the view that Kent in *King Lear* was a doctor, and appeared with grizzled wig, black suit, a cane held to his nose, and a box under his arm. He would support his view by the passages—

> "Do kill thy *physician*, Lear!"
> "To new climes my *old trunk* I'll bear."

The trunk, he said, being the medicine chest. Stephen Kemble, always an admirable *raconteur*, overflowed with such sketches. He described to Mr. Taylor, with infinite humour, a season of privation in a once wretched village, where the poor strollers could not muster a farthing, and where the unhappy beings, of whom he was one, were baited and hunted by furious landladies. To avoid this persecution he lay in bed two days, suffering the pangs of hunger, and then his only resource was a distant turnip field, to which he was persuaded to bring Davenport (the husband of the well-known actress), boasting of the "hospitality" of the establishment they were going to, its

vast size, and thus raised the hopes of his unfortunate companion, until the disclosure was made that it was a turnip field.*

* This story is valuable here for showing the worthlessness of the ordinary "funny" theatrical stories, for this was repeated with singular enjoyment in the profession as an incident in John Kemble's life, there being a satisfaction in the thought that one so dignified and gentlemanly had been reduced to such degrading straits. Stephen Kemble told it very dramatically to Mr. John Taylor.

CHAPTER II.

ROGER KEMBLE'S COMPANY.

ROGER KEMBLE was the manager of a company of these unhappy comedians, and ranged the counties of Staffordshire, Gloucestershire, and Warwickshire, which formed his theatrical "circuit." He was born in Hereford in the year 1721, and it was reported in the profession that he began life as a hairdresser. He claimed to belong to an old English Catholic family, and though his biographers tell the story of Captain Kemble, who did good service at the battle of Worcester, and of the Father Kemble, who was put to death for his religion, they do not make out any connexion between these members of the family and Roger. Still his manners, which were coloured by an old-fashioned courtesy, his ambitious views as to the education of his son, and the well-cut and dignified features of his children, seem fair evidence of breeding and extraction, though unsupported by the Heralds' College. Henry Siddons, long after,

told the author of *The Pleasures of Hope* that the names Campbell and Kemble were virtually the same.

In the year 1752, when he was wandering about the country, and irresistibly attracted by a horde of strollers, he fell in with Smith's Company at Canterbury, and "Fanny Furnival," a handsome actress, who afterwards found her way to London, took notice of his merits. His stalwart figure and aquiline nose were said to have recommended him to her good graces: and she proposed that he should join their corps. It was found, however, difficult to train him. Setting off to join Ward's Company at Birmingham, the pair halted at Coventry, where a Mrs. Quelch's troupe was performing; with whom Mrs. Furnival remained, while Kemble went on to arrange the engagement with Ward. It was a vulgar story in the profession, that when he returned he found a brawny Irishman sitting with her, who, on the direction of the lady herself, turned him out in a very summary manner.*

* Theatrical "stories" of this personal sort often are of a coarse and boisterous sort, set off with exaggeration, if not falsehood. But Lee Lewes, who tells the above, is tolerably accurate, and it besides agrees with the description of Mrs. Furnival given in other memoirs. Even to a London theatre she brought her "strolling" habits.

Mr. Roger Kemble

After which rude dismissal, jeered at by a mob which had collected to see this strollers' quarrel, he returned to Birmingham.

Mr. John Ward was a respectable Irish actor, who had been at the new Aungier Street Theatre in Dublin, playing with the Elringtons, where little Miss Woffington, then only fifteen or sixteen, was considered clever enough to be entrusted with important parts. She played once for his benefit; but it was said that Mr. Ward's roughness drove her from the theatre. This, however, was nearly twenty years before. Ward now commanded a corps of his own, which included his wife, and handsome daughter Sally Ward.

Passing by Stratford-on-Avon, he had given a benefit for the purpose of restoring the well-known Shakespeare bust; and it was his gaudy colouring that the hasty whitewashing of Malone was to efface. Mr. Ward, who must have seen Betterton, was very near living to compare that great actor with his own gifted grandson; but Mrs. Ward lived to see, or hear of, the glories of John and Sarah Kemble.

The Wards are buried at Leominster, with the following inscription on their tomb :—

Here, waiting for the Saviour's great assize,
And hoping, through His merits, hence to rise
In glorious mode, in this dark closet lies—

JOHN WARD, GENT.,
Who died Oct. 30th, 1773, aged 69 years.

Also SARAH, his Wife,
Who died Jan. 30th, 1786, aged 75 years.

Roger Kemble presently fell in love with his manager's daughter. She was very handsome; and Mr. Boaden says, "had once been tempted by a coronet." This ambiguous compliment was only too common an incident with many of her profession; but if it was an honourable proposal, it seems strange why she resisted such a temptation. Those who met her in after life a venerable matron, saw in her the stately peculiarities of both her children—the severe diction of the son, with the accurate elocution of the daughter, set off, however, with a flow of spirits which neither possessed. Mr. Ward vehemently opposed the match; but when he found opposition was of no use he reluctantly consented, consoling himself with a rough thrust at his new son-in-law. He had wished her, he said, not to marry an actor, and she had so far complied with his wishes. It is curious how many important actors had paid this bad

compliment to the profession which has made them famous.*

The marriage took place at Cirencester in the year 1753. Roger is described as a man of blunt sense and placid good humour. As he was a Catholic, and his wife a Protestant, an arrangement—that used to be found convenient in the case of mixed marriages—was agreed to, that the girls were to be brought up in their mother's faith, the boys in their father's. This doubtful ranging of a family into two hostile camps seems to have finally resulted in making the sons Protestants. In the present case it became a more serious question, from the large number of children, which reached to twelve. There were four boys and eight girls, according to the long list furnished by Mr. Campbell. There was SARAH and JOHN PHILIP, the two eldest and greatest; Stephen, Frances, Elizabeth, Mary, Anne, Catherine, Lucy, Henry, Charles, and Jane. Most of these children were born on the "circuit," at Hereford, Worcester, and other adjacent towns. Some died very young, while eight grew up. SARAH KEMBLE, the most gifted and famous of the

* This reply is commonly attributed to Roger Kemble, as made to Mr. Siddons.

family, was born in Wales on July 5, 1755; and within less than two years—on Feb. 1, 1757—she was followed into the world by her remarkable brother, John Philip.* The wandering parents perhaps welcomed with a sigh this new and burdensome charge upon their resources and weary journeys, and little dreamed how prodigiously they were destined to increase the "harmless stock of public pleasure."

By this time Roger had inherited the sovereignty of his father-in-law's company, and it was when he was performing at Brecknock, in Wales, that Sarah, according to a favourite periphrasis of the day, "first saw the light." Her mother was confined at a little inn in the High Street, known as the "Shoulder of Mutton," much frequented by drovers. It was not unpicturesque, being a framed and gabled old house, with its sign hanging over the door; and there the cheerful manager sought the company of the congenial Welsh farmers who crowded in on market-

* The following is her certificate of baptism, copied from the register book in St. Mary's, Brecon, 1826; given in the *Gentleman's Magazine.* "Baptisms, 1755. July 14, Sarah, daughter of George Kemble, a comedian, and Sarah, his wife, was baptized. Thomas Bevan, Curate." The mistake of George for Roger is curious, as well as the description, "a comedian."

days, and over a pot of Welsh ale entertained them with his adventures.

John Philip Kemble was born at Prescott, in Lancashire, and the house in which he "first saw the light" is still pointed out, a substantial two-storied farmhouse, built of the bluish-grey Lancashire stone. His father had a sort of dreamy purpose that his education at least should be that of a gentleman. This was no doubt a complacent homage to that "old family" with which he felt himself so indistinctly connected; or perhaps the triumphs of the officer's son, David Garrick, with the success of University men like Quin, Delane, and Mossop, at Dublin, might fairly raise the self-respect and ambition of the much persecuted actors.

We come occasionally on other traces of the grotesque course of the strolling manager, Roger, and his company. One unlucky youth found his way from Dublin, with a few pence in his pocket, and after wandering over the country in search of them, footsore and starved, came up with them at Hereford. He was directed to a barber's, who was described as being a brother of the manager's.* They did not

* In some accounts Mr. Siddons is described as a barber. It is strange why this profession is fastened on so many players.

offer him any relief, though he was half-famished; but the kindly strollers assisted him, and enrolled him in their corps. With them he wandered from village to town, by Ludlow, Worcester, Leominster, Bewdley, Droitwich, and other places, noting the half-piteous, half-ludicrous features in their life: how the leading actor with the fiery bottle-nose, who drank hard, had rubbed the powder off that feature, while his drunken lady stood ready with a powder puff at the wings to cover it afresh. This new recruit was Thomas Holcroft, author of the *Road to Ruin*, and in more favourable times he talked over these scenes with Mr. Roger Kemble. Other incidents in keeping with the vagabond traditions of the profession pursued the manager's gathering family, and Mrs. Roger Kemble could not increase the number of her children without some grotesque association. Thus her son Stephen came into the world under circumstances of good theatrical omen. Roger had led his little corps to Kington, a market town in Herefordshire, where it fell out that the lady had to play Anne Boleyn, in *Henry VIII.*, during which the birth of the Princess Elizabeth is supposed to take place. As soon as she got home, her confinement came on,* and Stephen

* He was baptized on April 21, 1758, as a correspondent of

was thus born under circumstances of dramatic propriety. Sarah received a surprisingly good education for a "stroller's" daughter, an advantage no doubt owing to her mother, who was a woman of good spirit.* She sent her child to respectable day schools in the country towns to which the "circuit" brought the troupe. At Worcester a kindly Mrs. Harris received her among her pupils at Thornloe House, refusing to accept any payment. A centenarian lady, alive a short time ago, recalled perfectly how the young girls in the establishment were inclined to look down on the "play-actor's" daughter, until some private theatricals being set on foot, her histrionic taste and experience put her forward, and made her services extremely valuable. She won universal popularity by exhibiting a device for imitating a "sack-back" with the thick paper that covers sugar-loaves. But this education must have been of a fitful sort, for the manager could not well afford to forego the

"Notes and Queries" has discovered. He could not therefore have been born on May 3rd, as Mr. Campbell states.

* Some of the following details will be found in the "Siddoniana," a paper contributed to "Titan" in 1857, by a gentleman who writes under the title of "Cuthbert Bede," who collected a few traditions in Worcester, and diligently searched some of the local newspapers.

assistance of a clever girl. Even when she was almost a child, the future Mrs. Siddons was announced, on some benefit, as a sort of "Infant Phenomenon," to add to the attractions of the evening. As she came forward, some confusion arose in the gallery, which overpowered all her attempts. Then her mother, who was a woman of promptness and spirit, led her down to the footlights, and made her recite the fable of "The Boys and Frogs," which at once lulled the tumult and restored good humour.*

A playbill of one of these early performances was not long ago found pasted to a brick wall in a shoemaker's shop in a country town. Considering that the family of a country manager is in the profession from the earliest age, it would be impossible to discover any particular period when Sarah made her first appearance. One tradition runs that it took place in a barn at the back of the old Bell Inn, at Stourbridge, Worcestershire, when some officers quartered in the neighbourhood gave their services. It was said that she burst into fits of laughter at the most tragic moment, and inflamed to fury the military tragedian who was playing with her. This piece was the *Grecian*

* Holcroft.

Daughter. Another tradition has it that her first character was Leonora in the *Padlock*.*

Roger in the meantime was sending his son John to a day school at Worcester; but when a great occasion pressed, he did not scruple, like Mr. Crummles, to present the whole strength of his family to the audience. The only theatre at Worcester was an old wooden building at the end of the yard at the back of the King's Head Inn, and there, in the year 1767, the tragedy of *Charles the First* was given, Mrs. Kemble playing Lady Fairfax, and her children the Duke of York and the Young Princess. Mr. Siddons was the James, Duke of Richmond. But the bill on so remarkable an occasion is worth producing:—

Worcester, 12*th February*, 1767.

MR. KEMBLE'S COMPANY OF COMEDIANS.

At the Theatre *at the King's Head*, this evening will be performed

A CONCERT OF MUSIC.

(To begin exactly at Six o'clock.)—Tickets to be had at the usual places.

Between the Parts of the Concert will be presented, *gratis*, a celebrated historical play (*never performed here*), called

CHARLES THE FIRST.

The Characters to be dressed in ancient habits, *according to the fashion of those times.*

* Tymms, "Family Topographer."

The Part of King Charles, Mr. Jones;
Duke of Richmond, Mr. Siddons;
Marquis of Lindsay, Mr. Salisbury;
Bishop Juxon, Mr. Fowler; Gen. Fairfax, Mr. Kemble; Col. Ireton, Mr. Crump; Col. Tomlinson, Mr. Hughes;
The Part of Oliver Cromwell, Mr. Vaughan;
Servant, Mr. Butler;
James, Duke of York (afterwards King of England),
Master J. Kemble;
Duke of Gloucester (King Charles's younger son),
Miss Fanny Kemble;
Sergeant Bradshaw (Judge of the pretended High Court of Justice),
Mr. Burton.
The Young Princess Elizabeth, Miss Kemble;
Lady Fairfax, Mrs. Kemble;
The Part of the Queen, Mrs. Vaughan.
Singing between the Acts by Mrs. Fowler and Miss Kemble.

To which will be added, a Comedy called

THE MINOR.

And on Saturday next, the 14th instant, will be again presented the above Tragedy, with a Farce that will be expressed in the bills of the day.

*** The days of Performance are Mondays, Thursdays, and Saturdays.

On another occasion Mr. Kemble's company of comedians was to give a celebrated comedy, called "*The Tempest; or, the Enchanted Island,* with all the scenery, machinery, music, monsters, and the decorations proper to be given, entirely new." All the

characters were divided among the family, including Mr. Siddons, Ariel, the chief spirit, being performed by Miss Kemble. Shakspeare was always a favourite with the strollers. At other times the lieges of Worcester read the following deprecatory programme :—

MR. KEMBLE,

With humble submission to the ladies and gentlemen of Wolverhampton and the town in general, proposes entertaining them on Wednesday evening, 8th instant, at the Town Hall, with a

CONCERT OF VOCAL AND INSTRUMENTAL MUSIC,

(*Divided into Three Parts*).

Between the several Parts of the Concert (for the amusement of the town and further improvement of polite literature), will be continued the Histrionic Academy, with specimens of the various modes of elocution by the INHABITANTS OF THE TOWN, for their diversion, without fee, gain, hire, or reward.

This performance must evidently have been given during the days of histrionic persecution, when Nero-like mayors were hunting down the unhappy comedians. The public were piteously entreated not to pay any money, and assured they could not be admitted on such terms, but must procure their tickets *gratis* at Mr. Latham's (who also sold tooth-powder). The performance concluded with *Love in a Village,* where the names of the performers are set out in the

most mysterious way, but we still recognise that of the great actress :—

LOVE IN A VILLAGE.

Sir William Meadows, by Mr. K—mb—le.
Young Meadows, by Mr. S—dd—ns.
Rosetta, by Miss K—mb—le.
Madge, by Mrs. K—mb—le.
Housemaid, by Miss F. K—mb—le.

It may be presumed that the gentlemen of the town who contributed to the elocutionary exhibition, were expected to furnish something towards expenses.

The future bride of Mr. Siddons was then only twelve years old, and her brother ten. This would seem to have been the amount of their juvenile playing. In the November following, John was sent to Sedgely Park, near Wolverhampton, a Catholic seminary, afterwards better known. It was chiefly devoted to the education of priests, and such scholars as went with this view were received upon "the foundation," or at least had only to contribute a small pension. There can be no doubt but that he was intended for the priesthood, and indeed it was only on such terms that the stroller's son could have secured so expensive an education. Canon Husenbeth has discovered a little entry in one of the college books, which seems to be the only memorial of the future actor's stay :—

LITHO. PHOTOGRAPHIC INST.

492, NEW OXFORD STREET

Mrs Kemble

"John and (*sic*) Philip Kemble came Nov. 3, 1767, and brought 4 suits of clothes, 12 shirts, 12 pairs of stockings, 6 pairs of shoes, 4 hats, 2 "Daily Companions," a Half Manual, knives, forks, spoons, "Æsop's Fables," combs, 1 brush, 8 handkerchiefs, 8 nightcaps.

"Jack abiit," July 28, 1771."

He remained there four years, and departed to begin his regular divinity course at the English College at Douai, there being no place in England where a priest could make his studies. There too he must have been entered on the foundation, which abroad is called a "*bourse*."

CHAPTER III.

MISS SARAH KEMBLE'S MARRIAGE.

MEANWHILE Sarah, thus brought up with such advantages as Wolverhampton and circuit towns of its class offered, was being taught music, and encouraged to read Milton and the poets. Her father had already noticed her fine powers of elocution, and, Mr. Campbell tells us, wished them to be cultivated, merely as a part of her education, and with no view to the stage. This seems highly improbable, as it would be only in human nature that he should wish to turn such gifts to profit. A common soldier billeted at the Wolverhampton Inn had been puzzling and delighting its frequenters with his acute remarks and extraordinary knowledge, and Roger Kemble was so attracted as to engage him to become his daughter's tutor. This turned out to be the grotesque adventurer Combe, of Dr. Syntax memory, perhaps the best type of Grub Street the world can point to. His straits having driven him to enlist, he

became the hero of a publichouse, and the landlord found it his interest to please a private who could read Horace. Money was subscribed to buy his discharge, and Roger Kemble, convivial always, gave him a benefit, the eccentric promising a speech in which he would disclose who he was; but he only said that "he was their most obedient humble servant," and left them. It does not speak much for the sense of the jovial Roger to have selected such a preceptor for his daughter; but Mrs. Kemble, with more sagacity, declined to ratify the appointment.* The violent dislike of this man for the favourite actress and her gifts, when she was in the height of pros-

* Mrs. Siddons later wrote down for Mr. Campbell an idle story about her going to sleep on the evening before a pic-nic with the book of Common Prayer in her arms, open at the page of the prayer for fine weather. She had set her heart on going, and a new pink dress had been ordered. When she awoke in the morning it was raining, and she found that she had mistaken the page, which was that of the prayer for rain. She put the matter right, went to sleep, and awoke again to find, says Mr. Campbell, "the morning as *pink* and beautiful as her dress." 'This showed," he writes gravely, "her confidence in the efficacy of prayer, or rather of the Prayer Book." But the poet's life of Siddons is full of strange statements of this sort, which read almost like burlesque, and recal passages in Murphy's "Garrick." Not less amusing is the "Quarterly Review's" solemn refutation of the truth of this little story—viz., that the prayers for rain and for fine weather are on the same page of the book! This could hardly be the case in every edition.

perity, was long after remarked by Mr. Rogers, who was not sufficiently acquainted with his history to know the reason. This Combe would then relate, we may suppose maliciously, how he remembered her as a girl, standing at the wing of a country theatre, beating a snuffers against a candlestick to represent the sound of a windmill, in some rude pantomime.

The young girl attracted great admiration, and was indeed an extraordinary "beauty." Neighbouring squires of condition paid her great attention; but their homage was prudently tolerated, while her affections were given to one in her own station. This was an actor of the name of Siddons, who came from Birmingham, where he had been brought up to business. He was good-looking, could play harlequin or Hamlet, and soon made an impression on his manager's daughter. The father was quite passive in the matter, though disapproving; and the mother, after some time, gave a grudging consent. But a Mr. Evans, a neighbouring squire, with three hundred a year, appeared on the scene, enslaved by Miss Kemble's coquettish singing of "Robin, sweet Robin," and the prospects of so splendid a match made the parents at once revoke their consent. The daughter now showed signs of inconstancy, or at least declined to oppose

her parents, nor would she elope, as her lowly admirer proposed. He was then summarily dismissed from the company, but was allowed the compliment of a farewell benefit, which he took advantage of in so mean and discreditable a way that it seems incredible how any girl of spirit or self-respect could have forgiven his behaviour. The Brecon audience had taken great interest in this love affair, and the actor actually confided his treatment to them from the stage in some "derry down" doggrel:—

> "Ye ladies of Brecon, whose hearts ever feel
> For wrongs like to this I'm about to reveal;
> Excuse the first product, nor pass unregarded
> The complaints of poor Colin, a lover discarded."

He then unfolded to them the stages of his attachment:—

> "Yet still on his Phyllis his hopes were all placed,
> That her vows were so firm they could ne'er be effac'd;
> But soon she convinced him 'twas all a mere joke,
> For duty rose up, *and her vows were all broke.*
>
> "Dear ladies, avoid one indelible stain,
> Excuse me, I beg, if my verse is too plain;
> *But a jilt is the devil*, as has long been confess'd,
> Which a heart like poor Colin's must ever detest.
>
> "Now your pardon he begs, as your pity he might,
> But here 'tis confess'd you have shown it to-night;
> For his merits, tho' small, you have amply rewarded,
> To accept the poor thanks of a lover discarded."

This gross piece of familiarity was in itself a proof of the state of the strolling community, and showed how its followers deserved the contempt that pursued them. Equally merited was the hearty boxing of his ears which awaited him at the wings from the angry mother of the young lady.

On his dismissal Miss Sarah was sent away to a Mrs. Greathead in Warwickshire, or "placed under the protection" of that lady, as Mr. Campbell says in his odd way. It was often repeated afterwards that this "dependent capacity" was that of maid to Mrs. Greathead. "This circumstance," he says, "is at variance with a rumour often repeated, I have no doubt with a charitable wish to make her early days appear as vulgar as possible — namely, that she went as nurserymaid into the house at Guy's Cliff. Families rarely present their nursemaid with copies of Milton's poetry; and besides, there were at that time no children to be nursed in the Greathead family. Her station with them was humble but not servile." Yet this is no more than over-refining, though we may be indulgent to the good-natured zeal of so warm a friend. As one of the family, he admits, informed him that she came to them "in a dependent capacity," it might have been as well to have told the whole

truth. The fact is she was lady's-maid to Mrs. Greathead. The Duchess of Ancaster told Mr. Geneste she well remembered Lady Mary Greathead once bringing this attractive attendant with her on a visit, who, it was remarked, delighted in spouting fragments of plays for the entertainment of the servants' hall; and that Lord Robert Bertie was so fond of listening and admiring her declamation, that Lady Mary had to beg of him to desist, and "not encourage the girl to go on the stage." Further, young Greathead told Miss Wynn, the "lady of quality," whose agreeable diary had been recently published, that he had often heard Mrs. Siddons read Macbeth "when she was his mother's maid." All the more triumph to the great artiste who was to raise herself from such a situation.

It is easy to see that the reason of this banishment was the young girl's refusal to give up the actor and accept the squire, and it was perhaps her own fashion of punishing the parents by refusing to follow their inclination, as they refused to sanction hers. As in all such struggles, the parents, with most apparent power, are always the weakest, and in the end have to give way. The young girl proved constant and forgiving. Mr. Siddons saw her several times in the "dependent

situation," a reluctant toleration was wrung from the father, and at last, on Nov. 26, 1773, they were married at Trinity Church, Coventry. This runaway match was to be one of the few bits of colour in the sober grey tissue of her life.

At this time we can quite understand what was the special charm of acting that so attracted provincial audiences. It was found in parts where she could indulge in simple, piteous grief, and, with her youth and beauty, affect the audience. A little picture, long after drawn by herself very graphically, proves this, and at the same time shows what a genuine and powerful instinct was working in her, giving assurance of those great principles which were to raise her to such a height. Here is the scene of her first acquaintance with Lady Macbeth.

"It was my custom to study my characters at night, when all the domestic cares and business of the day were over. On the night preceding that in which I was to appear in this part for the first time, I shut myself up as usual, when all the family were retired, and commenced my study of *Lady Macbeth*. As the character is very short, I thought I should soon accomplish it. Being then only twenty years of age, I believed, as many others do believe, that little

more was necessary than to get the words into my head, for the necessity of discrimination, and the development of character, at that time of my life, had scarcely entered into my imagination. But to proceed. I went on with tolerable composure, in the silence of the night (a night I never can forget), till I came to the assassination scene, when the horrors of the scene rose to a degree that made it impossible for me to get farther. I snatched up my candle, and hurried out of the room in a paroxysm of terror. My dress was of silk, and the rustling of it, as I ascended the stairs to go to bed, seemed to my panic-struck fancy like the movement of a spectre pursuing me. At last I reached my chamber, where I found my husband fast asleep. I clapt my candlestick down upon the table, without the power of putting the candle out, and I threw myself on my bed, without daring to stay even to take off my clothes. At peep of day I rose to resume my task; but so little did I know of my part when I appeared in it at night, that my shame and confusion cured me of procrastinating my business for the remainder of my life."

Mr. Siddons was later described as "a fair and very handsome man, sedate and graceful in his manner." He was remarkable for being quick in study, like his

brother-in-law, Kemble, and could master the longest part known between any two nights. He seems to have been an unpretending mediocre player, though indeed his wife's extraordinary superiority must have extinguished even such gifts as he had. Both now devoted themselves to the stage. They passed on to Wolverhampton, where a mayor was now in office who became the scourge of the strollers. He interdicted all performances. The King's Head Yard was closed to them, the magistrate proclaiming contemptuously, that he would suffer "neither player, puppy, nor monkey" to exhibit in the town. This interdict was after a great struggle taken off, when no less than three rival bands invaded the town, and when Roger's attraction, at the Christmas of 1773, were such sound dramas as *The West Indian* and *The Padlock*. Charlotte Freeport and Leonora were announced to be played by Roger's clever daughter, whose name was given, for the first time it is believed, as Mrs. Siddons, at a farewell "Bespeak" from her friends and patrons at Wolverhampton. An address written by herself, and spoken on this occasion, was lately found among the papers of a lady at Wolverhampton.

"Ladies and Gentlemen,—My spouse and I,
Have had a squabble, and I'll tell you why—
He said I must appear; nay, vowed 'twas right,
To give you thanks for favours shown to-night.

. . . . . .

"He still insisted; and to win consent,
Strove to o'ercome me with a compliment;
Told me that I the favourite here had reigned,
While he, but small, or no applause had gained . . .

"Pen me some lines where I may talk and swagger,
Of poisons, murders, done by bowl or dagger.
Or let me, with my brogue and action ready,
Give them a brush, my dear, of Widow Brady."

She then returned them her hearty thanks for past favours, and concluded in the almost unvarying form of histrionic acknowledgment:—

"First for a father, *who on this fair ground,*
Has met with friendship seldom to be found.
May *th' All-good* Power your every virtue nourish—
Health, wealth, and trade in Wolverhampton flourish!"

These last lines are delightful for their bathos. But this familiarity of address has always special charms for the player, and in the early part of her life at least, Mrs. Siddons was a little too fond of confiding to her audience little particulars about her family.

In the year following they found themselves at Cheltenham, then beginning to be a fashionable watering-place. One morning some of the "people of

quality" went to the theatre to ask the name of the play fixed for the evening, and were highly entertained when informed that *Venice Preserved* was the piece selected. They counted on what is really a genuine and exquisite treat—a tragic piece murdered into burlesque. Their anticipations were carried behind the scenes, and told maliciously to Sarah Siddons, who was to play Belvidera. The thought of this organized scoffing made her wretched. The play began. It was known that in the boxes of the little theatre were seated the " Hon. Miss Boyle, only daughter of Lord Dungarvan, a most accomplished woman," with Lord Ailesbury, then Lord Bruce, and other persons of rank. She went through her task very nervously, and when she heard some suppressed sounds—like titters—she was ready to sink. On the next day her husband was accosted in the street by Lord Ailesbury, who told the delighted actor that they were all enchanted, and that the ladies of the party were actually suffering headaches from the fits of crying caused by his wife's acting. He rushed home with the news. Then Miss Boyle came to call on her at her lodgings, and from that moment became her warm friend.* She made many

* Miss Boyle " married," says Campbell, " Mr. O'Neil, of

new dresses for her with her own hands, and "enriched Mrs. Siddons' wardrobe" with many of her own.

Meanwhile John Kemble was concluding his ecclesiastical studies at Douai. By this time he had discovered that he had no vocation for the priesthood. He had pursued his course diligently, and long after, when he had found his fame, would show friends his copy of Alban Butler's "Lives of the Saints," which had been part of his studies. He also surprised them by delivering speeches in that scholastic Latin which is used in theological classes. Scraps from the fathers too still clung to his memory. Those who had been with him at college—among whom was Dr. Milner, late vicar apostolic in England, and perhaps the best ecclesiastical scholar it has turned out—reported how much his power of declamation was admired; and his professors no doubt lamented that a fine preacher was now to be lost to the Church. Once he generously took on himself an "imposition" of two books of Homer that were to be got by heart by the whole class, and amazed the master by repeating some fifteen hundred lines.

Shane's Castle, in Ireland." He dwells in an awe-stricken manner on this simple call, which he says should not be called patronage, "too cold a word for what was friendship."

It was remembered also with pride how, when Kemble had to deliver an oration at one of the public exhibitions of the College, all the professors and scholars poured in. He was fond, too, of practising scenes for plays with his friends—a study diligently encouraged at all Catholic colleges—and was considered to excel in Brutus and Cato. So too, the "Death of the French King;" his "Latin Eclogue" was considered to excel all others—possibly no very high criterion of merit, considering the classical solemnities usually composed on such occasions.* Was it some secret turning to the stage, it may be asked, that caused him to abandon the sacred calling proposed to him? Considering what his genius proved to be, this no doubt was the case, though his taste was not of the overpowering, irresistible sort which drove Garrick into the profession. It was more likely a repugnance to the state of life appointed for him; but his acting always was marked by a semi-ecclesiastical flavour, a measured clerical deliberation, which came of his old Douai training.

* These facts are given in a very intelligent letter written from Dublin during his engagement there, and which had evidently been communicated on authority. It is to be found in the "Gentleman's Magazine," for 178—.

He left the place after nearly six years' residence, and landed at Bristol—Lee Lewes tells us—near the Christmas of 1775. He set off in search of his family, from whom he was likely to receive but a doubtful reception. One of the many rambling accounts of this stage of his life tells how on landing he went to Brecknock, where he found his father and the company. The former declined to receive him; and the charity of the corps made up a small subscription for him, to which Roger was with difficulty prevailed on to add a guinea.* He then set off to join "Crump and Chamberlain's company," who were at Wolverhampton. On his road he fell in with a jovial member of the profession, "Tom Shatford," who asked him to supper, and offered to be his fellow traveller. On Christmas-day they found themselves at an inn without a penny, and unable to proceed further. On this emergency it was agreed that two letters should be written, one in Latin to the parson (for which Kemble was no doubt responsible), the other in English to a lawyer in the neighbourhood; and it was expected that the sense of peace and good-will reigning on the earth

* J. A. Williams, "The Life of Kemble." The author was very familiar with the stage and stage-players, though his account is written in a vulgar clap-trap style.

that day would soften the receivers' hearts and induce them to send money. The adventurers were successful. They reached Wolverhampton, but while Shatford was received, Kemble was declined. Lee Lewes states that then hearing that Mrs. Siddons was at Liverpool, Kemble set off to look for her at that town. It is said that he found her there with her two children: a little boy, Henry, who had been born on Oct. 4, 1774, and a daughter, born on Nov. 5, only a few weeks before. But as this was only a few days before her appearance at Drury Lane, it is not likely that she would have remained at such a distance from London and at so critical a moment. It seems most probable, however, that he was accepted by Crump and Chamberlain after a delay. These *entrepreneurs*, it is to be noticed, were spoken of with some respect in the profession, and seem to have been the "Richardsons" of the day. Mr. Crump was described as bearish and tyrannical in his manners, Chamberlain as very sly and cunning; and they bore the nicknames of "Fox and Bruin." Under such patrons Kemble made his first appearance as "Theodosius," on the 8th of January, 1776—so the tradition runs, though accuracy under such conditions is not to be expected. His sister was just then preparing for the character of "Epicene" on

the boards of Drury Lane. He is described as not having been very successful; and the Wolverhampton critics preferred him in his next attempt—Bajazet—a tempestuous raving part, but which has always had a sort of fascination for tragedians. But at this time his pretensions were modest, as will be seen by the following fact. Among the actors who performed *Charles I.* with the juvenile Kembles, will be found one Jones, a sort of "handy" fellow who enjoyed Garrick's patronage. He took leading characters on the circuit, and was popular. Kemble, feeling his way, and ready to use every aid to help himself on, would put in the bills that he would play the particular character "after the manner of Mr. Jones!"* This would not have been an agreeable reminiscence for the great Kemble. But his general relations with his managers soon became intolerable, and he was said to have abandoned the corps, leaving some doggerel chalked up on the door of the barn which served for theatre:—

> "I fly, to shun impending ruin,
> And leave the fox to fight with Bruin."

His life had now perforce to take the complexion of that of his companions. He had no means of his

* J. A. Williams.

own; and the stroller's son must have suffered in a great degree the traditional privations of the craft. The profession delighted in repeating stories, how his landlady impounded his shirt, &c., and Sir Walter Scott deals thus pleasingly with these impalpable legends:—

"Mr. Boaden," he says, "is too grave to relate any of the minor misfortunes and hardships which his hero was subjected to in his novitiate, and repels with some asperity an account of Kemble and his companion breaking into a gentleman's orchard near Gloucester. 'Rigdumfunnidos' (Kelly) hints at our friend's having banqueted on turnips and peas in the open fields for want of better commons. There are gripes and indigestion in the very thought of the uncooked pulse."

Sometimes when reduced to straits, he appeared in odd situations; and one of the stories of the profession was, that he had taken up the character of a Methodist preacher.* This may have been a mere

* This is repeated by Lee Lewes and Kelly, and Sir Walter Scott seems to give credit to it. There was a certain humour and love of frolic in Kemble, only known to his private friends, and which those who gave him the grim nickname of "Black Jack" could not have suspected.

frolic; or perhaps was an exaggerated account of one of those moral readings which he was accustomed to give. But it seems certain that, like his strolling brethren, he had to serve a sore apprenticeship in shifts and devices for securing a livelihood, or discharging obligations. Thus it was told that he contrived to be turned out of lodgings, the rent of which he could not pay, for whipping a top over his sick landlord's room—"an act of such unfeeling barbarity," says Mr. Boaden in his own grave way, "as no pecuniary distress could extenuate." About every great actor and actress are circulated such idle legends. Lewis, the actor, told his friend Tom Taylor, how when on a "starring" expedition among the little country theatres, he was greatly struck by a young man who was acting Lovewell in the *Clandestine Marriage* in a very ridiculous dress, but which his correct gentlemanly playing made the spectator forget. He found that this was a Mr. John Kemble. A companion of Kemble's in these adventures was one Carlton, who exhibited tricks of legerdemain. When lecturing once at Worcester, he was said to have been arrested at the suit of a tailor, but was released through the assistance of his sister, Mrs. Siddons; her aid, too, rescued him from the Slough of Despond, and trans-

ferred him to a more reputable "walk," for she introduced him to Mr. Younger, then manager of the Liverpool Theatre. This was about the year 1778; so that now more cheerful prospects were before him. Yet this rude discipline must have been useful, and where there was anything like self-restraint and principle, must have developed qualities valuable for working his way through life.

CHAPTER IV.

MRS. SIDDONS' LONDON ENGAGEMENT.

ONE night at the Cheltenham Theatre a little incident took place, which recals one of those graphic scenes which the pencil of Charles Dickens sketched so delightfully in his "Nickleby." Those Hogarth-like pictures of country theatres, actors, and their proceedings could be illustrated from a hundred books of memoirs. He drew them from his own observation, but the same incidents were going on a hundred years before. Not the least amusing was the picture of the excitement when news was brought round that "there was a London manager in the boxes!" Thus sitting in the boxes of the Cheltenham Theatre was seen one night—not, indeed, a London manager—but the deputy of one; no other than Mr. King, whose admirable playing of Lord Ogleby was famous over the two kingdoms. No doubt the players went through all their resources, desperately challenging the attention of the London actor, for Mr. King was

in Mr. Garrick's company, and the idea of Drury Lane, prosperous, magnificent, well conducted, and directed by such a spirit, filled every actor's heart with awe. Mrs. Siddons, fortunately for herself, knew nothing of this stranger's presence, yet it was she whom he had come to see. Some of Lord Bruce's family had good-naturedly praised her to Garrick, and he had sent down this aide-de-camp to make a report. The play was the *Fair Penitent*, and King must have been impressed, for he reported warmly and favourably. A little later, Garrick sent to offer her an engagement at five pounds a week. She had joined Younger's company, then playing at Liverpool, and she accepted it at once; and she owned long afterwards that she was certain, now the opening was offered to her, that her success was to be as great as it in reality proved to be. With a different manager she would have made no complaint; but it was the fashion to reckon stinginess in him what was moderation in others. A recruit from the "circuit"—not even from the Bath Theatre, which was at the head of English provincial theatres—might be fairly well content with half of what was given to such tried and trained soldiers as Mrs. Yates and Miss Younge. We may conceive the hope and excitement

with which the pair set forth for London. She was scarcely strong; her eldest daughter, and second child, having recently been born, on November 5, 1775.

Garrick seems to have been delighted with her beauty and elegance, and, as it were, appointed her to be his favourite; he lavished encouragement on her, which she mistook for praises. It might seem strange that he should think of engaging a new actress when he was now at his last season, when he was declining Miss Pope's services, and was supported by such fine players as Mrs. Yates, Mrs. Abington, and Miss Younge. It seems probable that, distracted by the worry given him by these three ladies, he had thought the best way of securing peace for his last season, was to engage a young and handsome actress of whose powers he had heard such glowing descriptions.

When she arrived, she found Drury Lane in possesssion of these three haughty, jealous, and quarrelsome women, who were all but breaking the heart of their manager with their ceaseless complaints and insolence. Mrs. Yates presumed on her long and classical service; Mrs. Abington, a bold free woman, on the favour of the public, her vivacious gifts and real talent; Miss Younge, an actress of less merit

than either, had more pretension, but was still a fine player. The position of a young and beautiful girl, just twenty, timorous and lady-like, among these histrionic viragoes was enough to chill any heart. But nothing could exceed the manager's generous patronage and protection. He let it be understood that she was his *protégée*. He would hand her from the green-room and put her in the place of honour beside him. There the homage paid to him was almost regal, and the amount of "fulsome adulation," as she called it, that was offered to him, was incredible. All the more honour to that fine temper which could receive it placidly, and not be in the least disturbed. He sent her into the boxes to watch his own performances, at a time when Cabinet Ministers were imploring places and had to be refused. He made the ladies of his corps almost burst with fury and jealousy, because he chose her to represent Venus, and when the angry women tried to get before her on the stage and prevent the audience from seeing the new goddess, the good-natured Garrick took care to bring her well down to the front. And yet the return for this generous partiality was a rancorous and bitter charge of jealousy and malevolence nursed for years, and set down deliberately in the bitterest terms. If there was

any truth in the charge, so magnanimous a mind ought to have disdained to dwell on a trifling injury, which her own magnificent success had long caused to be forgotten. The resentful terms of this protest seem as fresh as if the offence had been just given. Even her friends had the effrontery to say that the great actor was jealous of a raw country actress. It was a safe charge to make, as it was a favourite one with the town. She too seems to insinuate the same thing. He praised, flattered her, gave her promises; then crushed her by putting her into unsuitable, obscure parts, and finally, after promising to recommend her to his successors, caused her dismissal by depreciating her. He was always, she said, objecting to her appearing in a prominent character, on the ground that the "rival actresses would poison her;" yet she was engaged, on her own showing, for the special object of mortifying those ladies. But this was not to be her first appearance at the footlights. Garrick had revived one of his successful spectacular pieces called *The Jubilee,* and which consisted of a long procession of all the Shakspearian characters, set off with music and scenery. This was a different thing from the pompous galas of our day, and must have been a very interesting show, for the finest players each took a

character and gave their conception of it by dress and expression. In this successful piece, Mrs. Siddons was allotted the complimentary part of Venus, and, with little Thomas Dibdin for her Cupid, the great actress walked round with the rest. It is characteristic of her that she should be collected enough to keep him smiling by whispered promises of bon-bons.

At last the momentous day came round. A paragraph in one of the papers had prepared the public for a young lady whose playing had met with great applause in the country. The night was that of Friday, December 29th, 1775, at a sort of holiday time, which must account for the audience being described as "numerous and splendid." There was some curiosity also to see the *Merchant of Venice*, for in those curious days classical plays were favourites, and people could wait until what they liked was underlined. Here is a copy of the bill that was fluttering in the hands of the splendid and numerous audience:

DRURY LANE.

(*Not acted these two years.*)

By His Majesty's Company, at the Theatre Royal, in Drury Lane, this day will be performed,

THE MERCHANT OF VENICE.

Shylock, Mr. KING. *Antonio*, Mr. REDDISH.
Gratiano, MR. DODD. *Lorenzo* (with songs), Mr. VERNON.

Duke, Mr. BRAMBY. *Launcelot* (first time), Mr. PARSONS.
Gobbo, Mr. WALDRON. *Salanio*, Mr. FAWCETT.
Salarino, Mr. FARREN. *Tubal*, Mr. MESSINK.
Bassanio, Mr. BENSLEY.
Jessica (with a song), Miss JARRATT.
Nerissa, Mrs. DAVIES.
Portia, by a YOUNG LADY (being her first appearance).

ACT III.—A Dance called the MERRY PEASANTS:
Mons. Fontaine, Mr. Sutton, &c.

When the moment came for her to appear she was quite overwhelmed, and ready to sink on the ground. That most terrible of all known *débuts* for a woman—the coming forth into that vast arena; the dusky amphitheatre of faces all rising in misty rows above each other; the multiplied and converging gaze—must leave a feeling as of something almost awful. The audience only saw a frail, delicate-looking but pretty creature tottering towards them rather than walking; her feet and eyes wandering, while a very ugly dress, a faded salmon-coloured "sack-back," made her awkwardness even greater. Her voice showed signs of nervousness, and at the close of every sentence it dropped into a hurried whisper: no one could distinctly make out what she was saying. King, who had gone down to report on her, of course carried the burden of the piece through. The criticism of the pit amounted to this, that she

was a pretty, awkward, and interesting creature, "frightfully" dressed. Towards the trial scene she grew more collected, and delivered her famous speech with great elocutionary propriety, but still with such a thin, faint voice that much of it was lost. But for the interest of her figure and face, it would have been pronounced a failure. Mrs. Siddons herself admitted as much by protesting against the unfairness of such a part being chosen for her.

The criticisms in the next day's papers must have chilled all her hopes. The *Gazetteer* was severe but just. The part indeed, it admitted, was only suited, even in the hands of an accomplished actress, for a display of elocution. It was therefore impossible to judge fairly of the lady who appeared last night; but from the specimen given, little more than mediocrity was to be expected. Her face and figure were certainly agreeable, but nothing at all striking. But with her voice was found special fault; for there was "a vulgarity in her tones." In short, "she was ill calculated to sustain that line in a theatre she has at first been held forth in." This sentence really explains her position: too much had been expected, and the judicious tact of Garrick had seen her crudeness. This was a fair critique enough, considering that it was of an obscure

girl of whom it had been whispered that she was to dethrone the reigning queens.

The *Morning Post*, directed by Parson Bate, a bruising, duelling clergyman, and a special friend of Garrick's, came heartily to the rescue. Its praise was too partial. "A young lady," it said, "whose name we understand to be Siddons," had appeared last night. "Allowing for her great natural diffidence, we see no unpromising presage of her future excellence. We think it one of the most respectable first essays we ever saw in either Theatre Royal. Her figure is a very fine one; her features are beautifully expressive; her action is graceful and easy, and her whole deportment that of a gentlewoman; but her *forte* seems to be that of enforcing the beauties of her author by an emphatic though easy art, almost peculiar to herself. Her fears last night so far prevented her doing justice to her powers, but at times her voice was rather low."

In conclusion, he prophesied for her the conventional "great eminence in her profession." Garrick was indeed bringing out a play of Mr. Bate's, still the praise was almost too hearty. But Mr. Woodfall, in the *Morning Chronicle*, and perhaps the best judge of all, was the most severe. Though on friendly terms, Garrick and he had had bickerings. It "understood"

that the new Portia had been the heroine of one of those petty parties of travelling comedians which wandered over the country. But even the mighty Roscius had once joined one at Ipswich. It owned that she had a fine stage figure; her features were expressive; she was uncommonly graceful; in short, she bid fair to be an ornament to the stage. But her voice was deficient in variety of tone and clearness. This, however, might be the effect of a cold or nervousness. She certainly delivered her words with great good sense and perspicuity. "Every allowance made, we advise her to throw more fire and spirit into her performance. She cannot be too early informed, that on the stage nothing is so barren of either profit or fame as a cold *correctness*." Putting these judgments together, this brings the very figure of the *débutante* before us. They seem on the whole fair and temperate.

She represented the character a few nights later, on January the 3rd, but her name was not given in the bills. She was now gaining courage, and succeeded better. A friendly letter was allowed to appear in Woodfall's paper, calling attention to the improvement, though complaining that she did not exert her full force. But she was presently to have another chance. Garrick was bringing out an abridgment,

by Colman, of Ben Jonson's *Epicœne*, and it would seem that by the day of performance that he could hardly make up his mind whether the new actress, or a gentleman of his old corps, should play it. At least we find in the newspapers that appeared that morning the part cast with different names; he determined, however, that she should appear—again a fresh mistake, as the part is a very awkward one, and of all things would require experience. In a few days the part was resigned by her and given to another. It is doubtful whether it should be played by a man or a woman. Critics complained of the confusion, when Mrs. Siddons, disguised in the piece as a woman, revealed herself at the end as a boy!* It was a second failure, was almost certain to be so, and it was foolish to have attempted such a character. The *Chronicle* said bluntly, that even when she recovered her speech she was "entirely destitute of the natural fire." But the loyal *Post* insisted that "she acquired great applause in the part."

* Such bewilderment often occurs in our modern burlesques. There is a precisely similar instance in Mr. Gilbert's *Princess*.

CHAPTER V.

FAILURE.

THE new actress was certainly unfortunate in the parts chosen for her. Here was now the first of February, 1776, come round, for which the Rev. Mr. Bate's opera was fixed—one of the most dangerous and critical experiments, as Garrick well knew; but Bate had served him, and he was determined to carry his piece through. When it is considered that the pen of this gentleman was as vigorous as his fist, that he had fought many duels, "thrashed" men who had offended him, and whom he had libelled, at Vauxhall or Ranelagh, it may be imagined that this was scarcely the piece to be received with unmixed approbation. Everything was done for it: the dresses were handsome, and Loutherbourg's scenery, representing a lodge-gate, and an avenue of trees through which the sun shone, with a lawn scene, was pronounced to have far exceeded anything ever attempted on the English stage. The piece was called *The*

Blackamoor Washed White, and turned on the notion of a young lover who had been forbidden the house by a "testy" old father, disguising himself and his friends as negroes, and thus gaining admittance.

The first night passed over pretty smoothly, but with some confusion. Mrs. Siddons played Julia, a conventional heroine, and on the second night was pronounced by the *Chronicle* to have done better than on the first. But on the fourth night, when the "row" began, a number of prize-fighters, supposed to be "friends" of the decorous clergyman, burst into the pit, and striking out right and left, restored a sort of order. On the next night both parties mustered in force, the clergyman being determined to revenge this insult. The scene defied description. Officers in the boxes fought with gentlemen from the pit and galleries. The ladies were driven from the boxes, and had to give up their places to eager combatants. At length Garrick came forward to ask the pleasure of the unruly mob, when an orange was flung at him. In everything done by this accomplished man there was a certain tact. Mr. Kemble, as we shall see later, would have made solemn and inopportune invocations to the galleries; but what did this abridgment of all that was pleasant in man say? "My situation as manager is

extremely critical; I wish to please the public, and at the same time protect the author's property. The opinion of the audience shall be complied with, as soon as I can gather it. But suffer me to say this: my theatrical life will be short, and I wish to end it in peace." Could there be a more delicate or a more practical appeal? Prodigious confusion followed. King then came forward to read a paper for the author, which announced the final withdrawal of the piece. A lighted candle was flung at him. At last, near midnight, amid a terrific uproar, Garrick came forward once more. They were not inclined to listen, until a gentleman called out, "Pay some respect to Mr. Garrick!" He then stated that the author had gone away, and taken his piece with him; that "he himself would gladly wait on them till six o'clock in the morning if they pleased. What other piece would they choose?" Thus disarmed, the rioters dispersed. To the last, Garrick showed that he had a *true* respect—not the respect of mere platitudes—for his audience, which brought in return a respect for the real drama.

But what a situation for the new actress! The *Chronicle* fell on her with extraordinary severity; "All played well," it said, "except Mrs. Siddons, who,

having no comedy in her nature, *rendered that ridiculous which the author evidently intended to be pleasant.*" No wonder that the memory of this first ordeal never passed from her mind. Still, Garrick was determined on giving her a fresh chance. A fortnight later she appeared in a new character. On the 15th of February Mrs. Cowley's *Runaway* was brought out—one of those pleasant, flowing comedies which are not so much "sparkling" in particular passages as coloured throughout by a general vein of gaiety; they give the idea of being written in prodigious spirits. Reading the mere story of such pieces, we say, "How pleasant all this is!" But here again she only obtained a "young lady" part. It was quite evident that the management thought her powers were not equal to anything much higher, and had determined to keep her in the "line of character" where a pretty face and quiet manner would be effective. It was curious that they should have declined to recognise her high tragedy gifts, and should have thus steadily put her forward in light comedy. But in this walk she was to receive a step in advance. Garrick was now reviving some of those substantial pieces in which he had obtained his old triumphs; and there is no doubt that it was a high compliment to trust such a part as Mrs.

Strickland, in the fine old comedy of *The Suspicious Husband*, to an actress of moderate powers.

There were others in the company who would have played it far better, though at the same time the agreeable Ranger would not suffer by having so pretty and elegant a creature to support him. The papers were now loud in their praises of Garrick and of Miss Younge's vivacious Jacintha, the *Post* saying good-naturedly that Mrs. Siddons "was by no means inferior;" but the other journals passed her over in complete silence. A lady of Bath recalled her coming on with Miss Younge in this piece, when there was some applause, which the latter very naturally assumed was for herself. The lady confessed she was affected by Mrs. Siddons' pathetic style of playing; but those near her in the pit laughed at the notion.

Richard the Third followed, which was one of Garrick's last performances, and he here gave her an opening in a tragic part—Lady Anne—a selection that was indeed an honour. He was exceedingly nervous, and yet he ran this fresh risk. On this occasion the great actor surpassed himself. It was admitted to be a performance almost awful for its savage intensity. The fire of his eyes struck terror into the young actress. She forgot his important

direction—that she should keep her back to the stage, so that *his* face might be presented to the audience—and received such a look of rebuke, that she thought she must have fainted on the spot. It is impossible not to feel sympathy for this poor young creature, whom the fates seemed to exert all their ingenuity in harassing. No wonder the critics passed her over this time altogether, except one, who pronounced that she was "lamentable!" This was her last appearance. It would almost seem that the public fancied there was an attempt to force her upon them, and resented it with at least coldness.

The explanation of the whole would seem to be this. The Kembles were all cold, but had that confidence in their own gifts which is nearly always found in real genius. She came accordingly, expecting to carry the town, as it were, by a *coup de main.* It was unfortunate that she should have been put into comedy parts, and she never was a comedian. Thus she acted, more or less, *à travers*, with a correct caution, and possibly a proud sensitiveness which she could not conceal. It is wonderful how delicate an instrument is an audience, and how it reflects back the tone of the player, and we might see this failure of sympathy fairly illustrated in a very gifted descen-

dant of hers, who, with great abilities and great earnestness, has never succeeded in touching her audience.

The memory of this unhappy season never passed from her mind. The player, from the conditions of his life, is the most blinded creature in the world to all that is connected with his own performance. He will not accept his defeat. There is jealousy, conspiracy, a thousand things to account for *that*. The real truth in the little controversy was, that Mrs. Siddons failed. She did not answer to the extravagant panegyrics sent up from the country. The experienced eye of Garrick saw the weakness and uncertainty which comes from want of training, which might pass in a small country theatre, but in a great house like his, would lead at best to feebleness and indefiniteness. He may have indeed wished by her successes to control his rebellious actresses; but when he saw her deficiencies, he owned that the failure would only make them more intolerable. This seems a natural and reasonable explanation, and this it was that kindly and wisely made him advise her to select for her *début* some safe, moderate part, where she could trust herself; and the *Merchant*, which had not been played for two years, was to be revived

expressly to bring her out. There is one little fact, however, that clears him triumphantly. A short time before Mrs. Siddons came to the theatre, a Mrs. King had been engaged from a country theatre, an ordinary but spirited actress; and here again it was given out that Garrick wished, by her agency, to mortify the rebellious ladies of his corps. She at once took a good position, and was received cordially. Yet Garrick did not grow jealous of her; he saw her ability, and she was given free range of some of the most leading parts. Mrs. Siddons never forgave Garrick for the chance he deprived her of; and yet he unconsciously served her.* Had she come forward in that great house in some pretentious tragedy, her health impaired, her voice weak, her nervousness excessive, the failure might have been so disastrous as to have hopelessly compromised all future success.

Now, fairly relieved from the stage, and having disposed of his theatre, Garrick did not forget her interests. He assured her husband that he would

* Her sensitiveness is almost amusing. "I of course thought him not only an oracle, but my friend; and, in consequence of his advice, Portia in the *Merchant of Venice* was fixed on for my *début:* a character in which it was not likely that I should make any great sensation, *and I was therefore merely tolerated.*"

procure her an engagement with the new managers, and bade him leave the matter in his hands. He had many claims from his old and faithful company for their good offices; but it is obvious these could not go beyond a recommendation. Even if he had engaged for as much as he is represented to have done, it is strange that Mrs. Siddons would not herself have spoken to him on the subject, or appealed directly to the new manager. She actually left town after the season, assuming that the matter was perfectly settled. She then went to Birmingham, where she had accepted an engagement for the summer; and thus her disastrous London engagement terminated, though she might look forward to renewing the attempt next season under more favourable auspices.

In the country her failure could not have much affected her interest; for she returned to the country with some sort of prestige, as having played with the great Garrick. She took with her the hope that the new manager would open to her fairer chances than the jealousy of Roscius had allowed her. At Birmingham she was given all the leading characters without dispute; and Henderson, who acted with her, was so struck with her talents that he wrote to Palmer of the Bath Theatre, urging him to secure her at once.

Henderson's friends considered that he too had been sacrificed to Mr. Garrick's unworthy jealousy; so, no doubt, the lady and gentleman often cordially agreed in their opinion of this common enemy. After a summer of hard work she was about returning to town, when she received a cold official letter from Drury Lane, announcing that the managers had no occasion for her services.

This terrible blow nearly killed her. The grief, disappointment, the thought of her children, the mortification—so it seemed to her—utterly crushed her, who was little more than a girl in years and disposition. Then it was that the treachery of Mr. Garrick was revealed; and this was but the complement of his previous treatment of her. There is something very pathetic in the way she recals, long after, her wretched situation: when she spoke of her "helpless babes," for whose sakes she gallantly and despairingly attempted to rouse herself, though for a time it was thought she was hurrying into a decline. "My endeavours," she says, "were blest with success, *in spite of the degradation I had suffered in being banished from Drury Lane as a worthless candidate for fame and fortune.*"

These are genuine words, though conceived in a

morbid spirit. She wrote them in the consciousness of her later overwhelming success, which could not brook the notion that her genius had not at *all* times deserved recognition. Degradation there was none, though it might be mortifying to have it repeated in the provinces, that "she had been dismissed from Drury Lane." So far from keeping his promise, she affirmed that Garrick had *depreciated* her to the new managers. But who was it that could have told her this story? The shifty and versatile Sheridan, who was naturally anxious to clear himself from the imputation of a want of judgment. Garrick could not have praised her highly, for her performance did not warrant such praise. The truth was, the managers were viewing the undertaking in a commercial sense, having paid a large sum for it, and they naturally thought that an undecided, rather tame young lady, who claimed to be a *tragédienne* of the first quality, but who had failed in comedy, would not be of much service to their theatre. Mrs. Abington indeed warned them they were making a mistake, but they could not afford to be speculative.

Filled with this gallant purpose, she set herself at once to dismiss the past. Early the following year,

in 1777, she found herself at Manchester, and made a great impression. She was now restored to her own line of characters, which were more melodramatic than Shakspearian. These were such parts as Euphrasia, Alicia, and Matilda in *Douglas*. She tried Lady Townly, and even Hamlet. Her "genteel" manners and composed ladylike behaviour contrasted in an extraordinary degree with the bearing of the average actress of the provincial theatres, and from this time she began to form a circle of steady and fashionable friends. In those days this was a great object of the player's ambition, and in nearly all stage memoirs any stray intimacy with lord or baronet is recorded with unusual pride. In Mrs. Siddons' instance it was only fitting homage to the brave battle she was fighting, and to her private character. Already the clouds were beginning to break, and now Mr. Wilkinson, perhaps the most important country manager in England, had offered her an engagement at his York theatre, which she readily accepted.

CHAPTER VI.

ON "THE CIRCUIT."

AT the beginning of this history we had some glimpses of the very lowest class of the profession, who were, in truth, no better than vagrants, having "no settlement," not paying "scot and lot," and over whose shrinking figures was always stretched the strong arm of the law. Between the barn of these unhappy professionals and the London patent theatres, a second order of playhouse interposed, which was safe from legal persecution, and, in some instances, of a most respectable sort. These were the theatres of the principal provincial capitals — Bath, as we mentioned, stood at their head; York, Hull, Manchester, Hereford, Liverpool, Worcester, and many more came after in degree, and were all well supported. In those days, towns like York were really capitals. The county families came in for the season, brought out their daughters there, and only the rich and important noblemen with their families could

afford a costly journey to town. Even some ten or fifteen years before, Mr. Shandy deplored the foolish migration of which such symptoms were then showing themselves, and proposed having couriers at every important outlet to stop the flitting families, and detain them in their native county. Some of these places were tolerably well conducted; but the most respectable were those managed by Tate Wilkinson, a shrewd and enterprising actor, who was lessee of houses at York, Hull, Liverpool, and other places, had built one at Leeds, and often made highly creditable attempts at elaborate scenery and dresses. The history of this player was a curious one. He had worked his way from the ranks of the hangers-on about a stage-door, and, through some gifts of mimicry, and a vast deal of impudence, had become a favourite with the galleries. He had made himself useful in small ways to men like Foote and Garrick, and when he found his hold on them failing, had made it strong again by the inconvenience and awkwardness they felt would ensue from the enmity of such a creature.* As he grew old, his smartness

* See, in illustration of this, the scene in his Memoirs, where he took off Foote, in reluctant obedience to the call of the audience, the actor himself being present.

and shrewdness turned to the object of making money, and his connexion with the theatres, his acquaintance with all the leading players, his travels and vicissitudes, gave him advantages for the post of country manager which few others have ever possessed. His Memoirs make perhaps one of the most extraordinary books ever written; they are singularly graphic and natural, and actually copy in type the garrulous ramblings of an old man. A margin being allowed for his prejudices and exaggeration, he is really correct in the main, and his chief value is in reproducing, unconscious of the effect, striking bits of character in men like Garrick and Foote. His own vanity and mean motives he exhibits in the same delightfully unconscious fashion, and this it is that makes his book a welcome contribution to the study of human character. In his managerial life he was good-humoured and popular, and as bombastic as Mr. Crummles himself. The intimate connexion he and his family were to have with the Kemble family warrants this notice of him. Mrs. Siddons came to serve under this director, at York, from Easter until Whitsuntide, 1777—a Miss Glassington having been her predecessor in leading parts. But the new actress soon eclipsed all competitors, even though there was a rival theatre in the place. Her manager says he

never recollected any one becoming such a favourite at York as she was during that short space of time. "All lifted up their eyes with astonishment that such a voice and such a judgment should have been neglected by a London audience." She played the Grecian Daughter, Murphy's "melandroso" piece.—"I had the honour of being her old father," says Wilkinson, complacently—but she seemed so worn, and in such wretched health, that he was wondering how she ever got through the part. She gained even popularity. Mr. Swan, the great local censor, though known to be terrible and fierce, was "foremost in lavish praise." But then, "it was well known that he indeed was ever guided by fashion and consequence." Rosalind, Isabella, Alicia, Indiana, Horatia, Aspasia, were all presented, true specimens, as we may guess from the very names, of persecuted and ever-declaiming heroines; with in comedy, Lady Townly, Lady Alton, and, strange to say, Widow Brady, in *The Irish Widow!* Her whole attitude, her figure, when she fell dying in *Aspasia*, was greatly admired by the York critics; it was thought "so elegant." The manager fondly clung to the hope that he would secure her as a permanent member of his company. His chief dependence lay on the finery which he had

provided for her Lady Alton, which was a most "elegant full sack-back, all over silver trimmings," and with which she was so pleased, that she used to say she would like to take it on to Manchester. No doubt it was as ugly as that other fatal "sack-back," which had lately so displeased her London critics. All the time she used to say she liked the country; that her treatment in London had been so cruel she would never play there again. On Saturday, May 17, she acted Semiramis for her benefit, and the York season closed. Palmer, of the Bath Theatre, had not forgotten Henderson's strong recommendation, and finding at last an opening, he concluded an engagement with her.

Now, after a long interval, reappears her brother John, set free from the stroller's corps. When Wilkinson lost the sister, he was not indisposed to try what talent there might be in her brother. The York company happened to be playing at Wakefield, October, 1778, and there, during an extra week which ended disastrously, he made his appearance as Captain Plume in the *Recruiting Officer*. They presently moved on to Hull, where, on October 30, he was allowed to declaim as Macbeth. This was followed by Archer, which Wilkinson recollected was not unlike his later

stately manner of giving comedy. But his grave, careful, collected style of playing was attracting attention, and his decorous manner, supported by his superior education, was making friends for him. At Hull he had his benefit night, for which he contributed an original drama of his own on the subject of Belisarius. It is amazing what a taste there was for these classical plays, the characters in which are about as stiff as waxwork figures. The company next moved on to York.

But at that city, Mr. Cumins was in "the leading business," a loud-lunged vigorous declaimer who played Hamlet and kindred characters. It may be scarcely fair to depreciate him; for there is recorded evidence of his powers in the fact that at the conclusion of his delineation of Charles I. a young girl in the boxes dropped down dead from agitation. And yet this painful incident expresses what seems now a lost art. As Mr. Boaden says, in those days all eyes were upon the actor, his face, his movements: his training, even among mere journeymen, aimed at *expressing* a story with all his powers. In the country theatre pretentious scenery was not missed, as indeed it should not be. This feeling is what has gone from us. As the curtain draws up our eyes run eagerly to the

showy scenery, passing by the insignificant figures in front. Audiences were then brought to see a phantom world, physical and moral, all in the actor's form. When Kemble took Mr. Cumins' part of Hamlet there was some jealousy, and when the manager told his servant to go and see the new actor in this character, he objected: "You see, sir, it is Mr. Cumins' part." Kemble's first appearance at York was in *Orestes*, on Jan. 19, 1779; his second, in *Ranger;* his third, in *Edward the Black Prince;* while for his benefit he once more chose his own Belisarius. On the benefit of Mrs. Hunter, he presented her with another little piece of his own, called *The Female Officer*. It was on this occasion that Kemble asked the officer on duty for the loan of some soldiers to set off the play, and was refused. He then applied to Lord Percy, the commanding officer, "who at once condescended to interest himself," Mr. Boaden tells us; in plain terms, permitted the men to form part of the stage army.* "It is a curious circumstance," goes on his

* "After the performance of the evening," says Boaden, "Lord Percy took Mr. Kemble home to sup with him. I learn from a most accurate and excellent friend of his through life, that Kemble did not then first become known to his lordship." This awe of the nobility is very diverting.

biographer, "that his early love of a more perfect exhibition of the drama should have been the fortunate cause of his intimacy with the late Duke of Northumberland"—a rather valet-like way of stating that the recollection of this trifling service, many years later, inclined Kemble to oblige the Duke in a matter quite as trifling, while the latter's respect for Kemble's public character, still later, prompted him to make the actor a really munificent present.

The incidents of country theatres have a great deal of colour and dramatic life. Kemble was now to be exposed to one of those humility incidents which used then to give the player a rude reminder of his low caste. The manager had indeed his patents and licences, yet if the audience took offence, he was still treated like the merest tumbler or mountebank.* The scene that follows shows how dependent the country manager was on his "kind patrons," the sheriff sending forty

* As happened at Wakefield to an actor in the bar of the Bull Inn, where an officer ordered the waiter to "turn out that player." The latter refused to go; and at night the officers got up a riot at the theatre, and insisted on an apology. They required the manager, threatening him with the House of Correction, to dismiss him. He refused. His house was deserted and shut up. The old York Theatre was situated in Blake Street, and was built in 1765 by Baker, who later became a partner of Wilkinson's. The only playhouse before that year was a room in the Minster Yard.

guineas on his night, seats being kept for the gentlemen of the grand jury, &c. A Mrs. Mason was taking her benefit in the play of *Zenobia*, supported by Mr. Kemble in *Teribazus*. One of the York ladies of fashion, who was credited with some wit and power of satire, occupied the stage-box of the little theatre, where she received parties of militia officers during the evening. The poor actress was not of the first class, and at every tragic burst, the lady and military party broke out in screams of laughter. This ill-bred proceeding is not unknown to our own generation; but in a small theatre the effect was specially offensive and wounding. The lady had openly professed her dislike of Mr. Kemble's style; she was the "loud" or "fast" personage of the place, and when the two were in the agonies of theatrical death, fresh screams of amusement issued from the side box. All Kemble did was to give her a look of contempt, which only produced fresh laughter from the party. At last he stopped abruptly. The house calling on him to go on, he said he *would* do so when the lady had finished her conversation, which "the tragedy was only interrupting." This skilful hit produced an effect, and overcome with confusion, the lady was hissed out of the theatre.

Her friends, the militia officers, instantly took her part, and the next day called on the manager, at her desire, to obtain satisfaction, and the actor's dismissal. The former honestly defended his player, urging that he was a gentleman by education and training, and that he could not be asked to make any submission. With this awkward compliment to his own profession, he introduced the offender, who boldly faced the militia gentry, and declined to make any *amende* whatsoever. At the theatre that night the officers saluted him with a loud call for an apology: the rest of the audience took his side, and encouraged him with shouts of "No apology." He commenced to explain how he had been treated, when the officers bade him hold his tongue, "stop his impudence," and ask pardon without further parley. With a natural and haughty scorn, which he later introduced into *Coriolanus*, he exclaimed, "Ask pardon? Never!" and walked off the stage.

Night after night the confusion was renewed, until at last General St. Leger and Dr. Burgh, two of his friends, intervened and secured him a fair hearing, when he pleaded his cause with such address, that he was boisterously acquitted. Such were the

disgraceful scenes to which the actor was then exposed.*

This woman, who could not be called a lady, was not cured by this public mortification. Some years later, when Michael Kelly was playing, she interrupted him in the same vulgar way, bursting into screams of laughter, and saying loud enough to be heard over the house, "Why, the fellow has got a watch." The spirited actor came forward at once, addressed her, "Yes, madam, one of the best in England," and gave her a severe rebuke, which brought down the hisses of the house and forced her to retire in confusion.

No one could have worked harder than he did during all this probation, and it will be seen that he had the laudable ambition to make himself as conspicuous by his good breeding and cultivation, as by his playing. He wrote prologues for the benefit of local institutions, complimentary verses, plays—in short,

* Kemble was, after all, only paying the penalty for the indecent behaviour of members of his own profession. Only a short time before, a Mrs. Montague, on these very boards, had defied her audience, who wished her to read a part; and when they shouted, "Off, off!" flung her book into the pit with a "Curse you all!"

began to be known and sought as a man of reading and education. There had lately joined the company Mr. and Mrs. Inchbald — the latter a charming woman — the mere description of whose face and character excites an interest. There was a kind of soft tenderness about her which accounted for the passionate affection of her husband. Her gifts were extraordinary: she united humour, delicate touches of character, fair critical judgment, and an art of story-telling that is akin to Goldsmith's, with surprising refinement that pervades all her efforts. Her husband died suddenly and left her a widow. Kemble had been their intimate friend, and his devotion had been so conspicuous, that it was confidently expected he would seize the opportunity to offer himself. The lady was of the same religion as he was, and there might have been many advantages from such a union. It is probable that his cautious disposition was not inclined to hamper his career by taking on him fresh responsibilities. But he satisfied his feelings by writing a Latin inscription for Mr. Inchbald's tomb, and addressed a blank verse ode to his memory.*

* The following specimen of Mr. Kemble's poetical powers seems to justify that buying up all the copies of his Fugitive Poems which he could find :—

He also played for the widow's benefit, who herself presently came forward for her *own* benefit in the seemingly appropriate part of Hector's widow, *Andromache.* This incurable propensity of players for taking the audience into confidence often leads them into such indecorous exhibitions. Another of his literary attempts was an alteration of the *Comedy of Errors,* under the title of *Oh, It's Impossible!* in which he turned the two Dromios into negroes! During his later majestic Shakspearian idolatry it would have been unlucky for him had any one

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PROLOGUE TO THE *FOUNDLING,*

ACTED AT YORK FOR THE BENEFIT OF THE LUNATIC ASYLUM.

"From the mild regions of her native sky,
O'er Britain's isle sweet pity cast her eye.
She cast—and sorrow heaved her melting breast,
As to her view pale sickness stood confest.

"Daughter of hell, a direr fiend than war,
With hasty stride plague rushes from afar;
Her savage pleasure grows on spreading death,
And parent nations orphaned by her breath.

"The love lorn virgin, wandering through the gloom
Of yew-bound churchyards and the mouldy tomb,
Sung to the moon of Margaret's grimly ghost,
Of Henry's broken vows, and Emma lost.
Here pity wept—and from her tears arose
A kind asylum for the mad one's woes."

thought of reviving this gross indiscretion, which speaks an extraordinary deficiency of taste or even intelligence. This lapse was in a measure redeemed by his giving some entertainments of an elocutionary sort; and one evening in 1780, at Leeds, he gave a regular Reading and a lecture, which he entitled *An Attic Evening Entertainment*, with selections from Shakspeare, Sterne, Collins, and the Scriptures, so as to excite the admiration of Mr. Cornelius Swan, the great York critic. This gentleman was quite a character. He it was who "discovered" Mrs. Jordan, and the manager gives a picture of him sitting by her bedside, with an old red cloak of Mrs. Bland's wrapped round him, giving her lessons. "Really I don't exceed," he said, "when with truth I declare she acts it nearly as well as I could myself." But this praise of Kemble, which is found in the *York Register* of this date, is certainly from his pen:—

"With all his faults we cannot but consider Mr. Kemble as a phenomenon in the theatrical world. His Hamlet is on the whole a most masterly performance. After this, his best characters *indubitably are* the Roman Actor, Bireno, and Demetrius. *They are unexceptionably inimitable.* In delivering odes,

Sterne's stories, &c., he is happier than any person in our recollection."

Near the end of the performance—and readers of our own day follow the modest precedent—came little pieces of his own, as "Night—Elegy on Mr. Inchbald, Mr. KEMBLE." On another occasion, at York, he gave a selected entertainment, entitled *Humour and Passion*, which was an olio, with "a defence of the stage by Paris the Roman Actor. Paris the Roman Actor, Mr. KEMBLE." By July, 1781, he had found his way with the company to Edinburgh, where he played Puff, and afterwards returned to York. I pass over little unimportant incidents; but he had thus three years of hard work and of good useful training in a very tolerable school. Already his steadiness and diligence were bearing fruit: he was beginning to be heard of as a safe, sound, effective actor; and now Mr. Daly, the manager of the Theatre Royal, Smock Alley, has sent to engage him for the Dublin season at the "star" salary of five pounds a week. He must have hailed this translation with delight. The Irish audiences were critical but enthusiastic, and if they approved heartily, that passport was sure to throw wide open the doors of the London houses.

CHAPTER VII.

THE BATH THEATRE.

THE Bath Theatre, as we have seen, held the highest place in the English stage out of London. The handsome city was as gay as it was handsome, with a sort of *rococo* dignity, kept up by such antiquated machinery as masters of ceremonies, assembly rooms, and a rigorous exclusiveness. The theatre was, in the hackneyed phrase of the day, "an elegant and commodious structure," situate in Orchard Street. It had just been remodelled and decorated, the proscenium was adorned with pillars of the Ionic and Doric orders, while its ornaments, said an admiring description, "were expressive of, and bore analogy to the amusement of the place." There was a handsome crushroom, and the days of performance were Tuesdays, Thursdays, and Saturdays. Mr. Palmer was the well-known manager.

Mrs. Siddons had to play with Dimond as the *jeune premier*, and occasionally with Henderson, who had

been dubbed the "Bath Roscius," and who had been thrust into an absurd rivalry with Garrick. Mrs. Siddons' eyes had not been yet opened by her failure at Drury Lane; and the first pieces in which she presented herself to the Bath audiences were Lady Townly and Mrs. Candour, two characters from comedy. Even in this matter she complained of unfair treatment, and that she was not allowed full scope in so unsuitable a department, the regular "leading lady" being, as of right, entitled to the best comedy characters. Mrs. Piozzi owned that Mrs. Siddons did not shine; but that her Mrs. Candour was good, she threw such significance into her face. Even here the disabilities attendant on failure pursued her for a while, for the manager was at first not very eager in her favour. Thursdays were the nights of the cotillon balls, which always emptied the theatre; and for a time she was put forward—no doubt owing to the claims of the leading ladies—on these unattractive occasions. But gradually her powers began to be discovered, and she, in her turn, began to draw away spectators from the cotillon balls. The engagement began in October, 1778, and lasted for some four years. Her salary was three pounds a week, not a very liberal amount, but respectable, considering her modest

claims and the amount allowed at other theatres. During this time she laboured with a resolution that was almost heroic, making friends everywhere, conscientiously striving to please her public, and improving herself by study and practice. The manager was also proprietor of a theatre at Bristol; and after a hard morning's rehearsal at Bath she had to set off, and drive to this town to play for the night, to return the next day and play some heavy and fatiguing part at Bath. But she was gradually making way. Her wonderful performance of tragedies began to bring those pieces into fashion. The Mourning Bride, Juliet, the Queen in *Hamlet*, Jane Shore, Isabella, with a whole round of such characters, raised her more and more into notice. She still looked back resentfully on London, and affected to never think of returning there. Her family was now increasing; another daughter had been born. But her friends were mustering in strength, and she was now found to be a growing attraction at the theatre. "When I recollect all this labour of mind and body," she says, "I wonder that I had strength and courage to support it, interrupted as I was by the cares of a mother, and by the childish sports of my little ones, who were often most unwillingly hushed to silence

for interrupting their mother's studies." Here too, in January, 1780, she brought out a sister of hers, Miss Fanny Kemble. Her own benefit was in the following month, when she gave Jane Shore, and, on account of the crowd, laid out the whole pit into stalls, reserving a few front rows in the gallery "for the gentlemen of the pit." She "entreated their indulgence for this liberty," and made the most humble apologies. No manager or artist would dream of apologizing *now*. The pit frequenters have been ruthlessly driven away *out* of the house into the dark caverns under the boxes, to the great prejudice of all good acting. Those who have ejected these sturdy appreciators are too genteel to indulge in that hearty encouragement which gave such a spirit to the old acting. The voices too travel away and are lost in these gloomy excavations, whence neither play of expression nor the effect of the scene can be witnessed. One of these benefits produced to her 146*l.*—a very handsome sum. Her husband acted becomingly; though a Mrs. Summers, of the company, who played as her "confidante" in tragedies, said he was a bad actor, but an excellent judge, always drilling her, and very cross at any failure.

More than a year before her actual engagement in

town, some negotiations had been set on foot through Mr. Linley, who had lived in Bath. And in 1781 her friend Dr. Whalley, one of the votaries of a wearisome muse then in fashion, who celebrated every occasion with feeble rhymes, announced a congratulatory poem on "Mrs. Siddons being engaged at Drury Lane." But this was quite premature, and the actress herself was indifferent, thinking only of the hearty and delicate patronage of her friends, always kindly and gracefully rendered. As when Mr. Pigott presented her with sixty guineas, "in order," he said, "to secure tickets to a society of gentlemen, who supposed it proper to do it thus early, knowing the demand for them would be so great by-and-by." "Was it not elegant?" she asks. The glimpses of Bath society in which she moved, and which we find in Dr. Whalley's collection of letters, are highly characteristic. There we see Miss Seward, intervening from a distance, with Dellacruscan raptures over some poor verses, her heart "vibrating to every sentence of your last charming letter," and wishing in vain to "avoid this dull delay in the communication of its responsive ideas." This was the keynote. Every one was at this time concerned for the play of "our friend Benignus," a Mr. Pratt of the place, which they were trying to bring out; and

no one was more hearty than Mrs. Siddons, whom he later was to treat with signal ingratitude. All through her Bath career she seems to have been cherished with singular affection, and her letters to her friends give a very engaging portrait of a young and pretty woman, full of spirit and ingenuousness, and a gentle confidence, which is always sure to attract. "I cannot express," she wrote to her friend Dr. Whalley, from Bristol, "how much I am honoured by your friendship, therefore you must not expect words, but as much gratitude as can inhabit the bosom of a human being. I hope, with a fervency unusual upon such occasions, that you will not be disappointed in your expectations of me to-night; but sorry am I to say I have often observed, that I have performed worst when I most ardently wished to do better than ever. Strange perverseness! *And this leads me to observe* (*as I believe I may have done before*), *that those who act mechanically are sure to be in some sort right, while we who trust to nature* (*if we do not happen to be in the humour*, which, however, Heaven be praised, seldom happens) are dull as anything can be imagined, because we cannot feign. But I hope Mrs. Whalley will remember that it was your commendations which she heard, and judge of your praises

by the benevolent heart from which they proceed, more than as standards of my deserving. Luckily I have been able to procure places in the front row of the next to the stage-box, on the left hand of you as you go in. These I hope will please you." Her letters of thirty years later are as warm and affectionate.

At last whispers of this Bath star began to reach London. Mr. Henderson, whose good report had recommended her to the Bath management, was to do nearly the same good office for her in London. He spoke of her there with the most unconcealed admiration, and trumpeted her praises heartily. She had acted Beatrice to his Benedick, and he was delighted with her performance.* Old Sheridan too, her firm admirer and encourager, no doubt sang her praises to his son.

The managers of "Drury Lane," in their search for novelty, were not disinclined to try an experiment which could do them no harm—and in the summer of 1782 made her the formal offer of an engagement. She received it curiously: "After my former dis-

* Mr. Campbell says "that he pronounced that she was an actress who never had an equal, and never would have a superior." But he forgot that these were the very words used by Mrs. Porter in praise of the young Garrick.

missal from thence it may be imagined that this was to me a triumphant moment." This was a specimen of the old rather undignified pique or vexation, and the triumph was pardonable enough. Strange to say, the manager of the Bath house was quite careless as to keeping this attraction; and Boaden heard that, when this offer came, she was so indifferent to the prospect, and perhaps so timorous as to the result, that she was willing to remain among her beloved friends, if only a slight increase was made in her salary. Palmer was not very eager, and delayed until it was too late. She would have even been content to bind herself for a term of years on very modest terms. Towards the end of May, 1782, it was known that she was leaving, and she took her farewell benefit. There was something a little undignified in the fashion in which she chose to appeal to the sympathies of her friends. It was announced in the bills that she would play *The Distressed Mother*, and that after the piece she would deliver a poetical address, written by herself, in the course of which she would produce to the audience Three Reasons for her quitting the theatre. There was much speculation and gossip, even among the actors, as to what she could mean. But she kept it all a secret till the proper

moment. At the close of the play she came forward and recited the following lines, which are pleasing and natural, and contrast favourably with "occasional addresses" of our own time :—

"Have I not raised some expectation here?—
Wrote by herself?—What! authoress and player?—
True, we have heard her,—thus I guess'd you'd say,
With decency recite another's lay;
But never heard, nor ever could we dream
Herself had sipp'd the Heliconian stream.
Perhaps you farther said—Excuse me, pray,
For thus supposing all that you might say,
What will she treat of in this same address?
Is it to show her learning?—Can you guess?
Here let me answer—No: far different views
Possess'd my soul, and fired my virgin Muse;
'Twas honest gratitude, at whose request
Shamed be the heart that will not do its best.
The time draws nigh when I must bid adieu
To this delightful spot—nay, ev'n to you—
To you, whose fost'ring kindness rear'd my name,
O'erlooked my faults, but magnified my fame.
How shall I bear the parting? Well I know
Anticipation here is daily woe.
Oh! could kind Fortune, where I next am thrown,
Bestow but half the candour you have shown,
Envy, o'ercome, will hurl her pointless dart,
And critic gall be shed without its smart;
The numerous doubts and fears I entertain,
Be idle all—as all possess'd in vain.—
But to my promise. If I thus am bless'd,
In friendship link'd, beyond my worth caress'd,—

Why don't I here, you'll say, content remain,
Nor seek uncertainties for certain gain?
What can compensate for the risks you run,
And what your reasons?—Surely you have none.
To argue here would but your time abuse:
I keep my word—my reasons I produce.

Here she went to the wing and brought forward her three children, with the result, as of course, of prodigious dramatic effect.

"These are the moles that bear me from your side,
Where I was rooted—where I could have died.
Stand forth, ye elves, and plead your mother's cause:
Ye little magnets, whose soft influence draws
Me from a point where every gentle breeze
Wafted my bark to happiness and ease—
Sends me adventurous on a larger main,
In hopes that you may profit by my gain.
Have I been hasty?—am I then to blame?
Answer, all ye who own a parent's name!
Thus have I tired you with an untaught Muse,
Who for your favour still most humbly sues,
That you, for classic learning, will receive
My soul's best wishes, which I freely give—
For polished periods round, and touched with art,—
The fervent offering of my grateful heart."

She concluded the evening by playing Nell, in *The Devil to Pay.** This was her last appearance. She

* It was not surprising that this proceeding led to some ridicule. A couple of months later two actresses of the company announced that for their benefit "they would produce reasons for their continuing on the Bristol stage."

was heartily grieved to leave these good people. She had now four months to prepare herself, but she devoted them to hard work at the country theatres. A kind friend, who had admired and compassionated her struggles, and was enthusiastic as to her gifts, was already busy in town, spreading eager praises of her talents in fashionable society.

Towards the end of August she set out on a little professional tour, having finally left Bath; and reached Weymouth, working her way slowly on to London. One letter which she wrote to her friends the Whalleys, giving an account of her adventures, is so lively and graphic, so characteristic, that it is worth while inserting in this place.

"You will be pleased to hear," she says, "that Mrs. Carr was very civil to me, gave me a comfortable bed, and I slept very well. We were five of us in the machine, all females but one, a youth of about sixteen, and the most civilized being you can conceive, a native of Bristol too.

"One of the ladies was, I believe verily, a little insane, her dress was the most peculiar, and manner the most offensive, I ever remember to have met with; her person was taller and more thin than you can imagine, her hair raven black, drawn as tight as

possible over her cushion before and behind, and at the top of her head was placed a solitary fly-cap of the last century, composed of materials of about twenty sorts, and as dirty as the ground; her neck, which was a thin scrag of a quarter of a yard long, and the colour of a walnut, she wore uncovered for the solace of all beholders; her Circassian was an olive-coloured cotton of three several sorts, about two breadths wide in the skirt, and tied up exactly in the middle in one place only. She had a black petticoat, spotted with red, and over that a very thin white muslin one, with a long black gauze apron, and without the least hoop. I never in my life saw so odd an appearance, and my opinion was not singular, for wherever we stopped, she inspired either mirth or amazement, but was quite innocent of it herself. On taking her seat amongst us at Bristol, she flew into a violent passion on seeing one of the windows down. I said I would put it up if she pleased; 'To be sure,' said she, 'I have no ambition to catch my death.' No sooner had she done with me, but she began to scold the woman who sat opposite to her for touching her foot: 'You have not been used to riding in a *coach*, I fancy, good woman.' She met in this lady a little more spirit than she had found in me, and we

were obliged to her for keeping this unhappy woman in tolerable order the remainder of the day. Bless me! I had almost forgot to tell you that I was desired to make tea at breakfast. Vain were my endeavours to please this strange creature; she had desired to have her tea in a basin, and I followed her directions as near as it was possible in the making her tea, but she had no sooner tasted it than she bounced to the window and threw it out, declaring she had never met with such a set of awkward, ill-bred people; what could be expected in a stage-coach, indeed? She snatched the canister from me, poured a great quantity into the basin, with sugar, cream, and water, and drank it all together.

"Did you ever hear of anything so strange? When we sat down to dinner, she seemed terrified to death lest anybody should eat but herself. The remaining part of our journey was made almost intolerable by her fretfulness; one minute she was screaming out lest the coachman should overturn us; she was sure he would, because she would not give him anything for neglecting to keep her trunk dry; and, though it was immoderately hot, we were obliged very often to sit with the windows up, for she had been told that the air was pestilential after sunset, and

that, however other people liked it, she did not choose to hazard her life by sitting with the windows open. All were disposed, for the sake of peace, to let her have her own way, except the person whom we were really obliged to for quieting her every now and then. She had been handsome, but was now, I suppose, sixty years old. I pity her temper, and am sorry for her situation, which I have set down as that of a disappointed old maid.

"At about seven o'clock we arrived at Dorchester; on my stepping out of the coach a gentleman very civilly gave me his hand—who should it be but Mr. Siddons, who was come on purpose to meet me? He was very well, and the same night I had the pleasure of seeing my dear boy more benefited by the sea than can be conceived. He desires me to thank Mr. Whalley for the fruit, which he enjoyed very much. We have got a most deplorable lodging, and the water and the bread are intolerable, 'but travellers must be content.' Mr. Whalley was so good as to be interested about my bathing—is there anything I could refuse to do at his or your request? I intend to bathe to-morrow morning, cost what pain it will. I expected to have found more company here.

"I went to Dorchester yesterday to dine with

Mr. Beach, who is on a visit to a relation, and has been laid up with the gout, but is recovering very fast. He longs to see Langford, and I am anxious to have him see it. I suppose Mr. Whalley has heard when Mr. Pratt comes; pray present the kindest wishes of Mr. Siddons, little Harry, and myself; his little girl has returned to school. I hope Mr. Whalley will do me the favour to choose the ribbon for my watch-string. I should like it as near the colour of little dear Paphy's ear as possible. I did not very well comprehend what Lady Mary (Knollys) said about the buckles. Will you please to give her my respectful compliments, and say I beg her pardon for having deferred speaking to her on that subject to so awkward a time, but hope my illness the last day I had the honour of seeing her ladyship will be my excuse. I hope I shall be favoured with a line from you, and that her ladyship will explain herself more fully then. Harry has just puzzled me very much. When going to eat some filberts after dinner, I told him you desired I would not eat them; 'but,' says he, 'what would you have done if Mr. Whalley had desired you would?' I was at a stand for a little while, and at last he found a means to save me from my embarrassment, by saying: 'but you know Mr.

Whalley would not desire you to eat them, if he thought they would hurt you.' 'Very true, Harry,' says I; so it ended there.

"I look forward with inexpressible delight to our snug parties, and I have the pleasure to inform you that I shall not go to London this winter. Mr. Linley thinks my making a partial appearance will neither benefit myself nor the proprietors. Mrs. Crawford threatens to leave them very often, he says, but supposes she knows her own interest better. I should suppose she has a very good fortune, and I should be vastly obliged to her if she would go and live very comfortably upon it. I'll give her leave to stay and be of as much service to my good and dear friend's tragedy as she possibly can, and then let her retire as soon as she pleases. I hope I shall not tire you; Mr. Siddons is afraid I shall, and in compliance to him (who, with me, returns his grateful acknowledgments for all your kindnesses), I conclude with, I hope, an unnecessary assurance, that I am ever your grateful and affectionate servant, S. Siddons."

"P.S.—Please to present our joint compliments to Mr. Whalley, Mrs. Whalley, and Miss Squire, and, in short, the whole circle, not forgetting Mrs. Reeves,

to whom I am much obliged. In an especial manner, I beg to be remembered to the cruel beauty, Sappho. She knows her power, and therefore treats me like a little tyrant. Adieu! God for ever bless you and yours. The beach here is the most beautiful I ever saw." *

It was thus evident that though she broke her connexion with Bath, the London managers were still tolerably indifferent about her coming. She met them with an indifference quite as marked. Her heart already was turning back to her friends with whom she had been so happy. Such moderation, such control, is rarely seen in the profession united with such genius.

Here was a new chance and probation for the actress, with a whispering at her heart that she would yet reverse that harsh judgment, now seven years old. She would do this in spite of that "envy's dart and critic's gall," on which she still dwelt, and to which she still imputed her failure.

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* Memoirs of Dr. Whalley.

CHAPTER VIII.

A NIGHT OF TRIUMPH.

THE contrast between the state of Drury Lane Theatre when Mrs. Siddons returned to it, and its old wealth and even splendour of talent when Garrick withdrew slowly up the stage and took his last longing look at the finest and most affectionate audience ever seen within its walls, was almost extraordinary. Its old strength had quite fallen away. The bills now exhibited such names as Parsons, Aicken, Barrymore, Dodd, Moody, and Mrs. Bulkeley. Gentleman Smith and Palmer remained, and King was stage-manager. But Abington and Yates—veterans now—with Miss Younge, belonged no longer to the company. No more striking proof of the reckless incapacity of Sheridan could have been furnished than these fatal desertions. The feature of Garrick's fine masterly management had been that the good stock of plays were to be always kept in readiness, each finely mounted with the same almost

unvarying cast. This gave a solidity and permanence to his administration; the plays and players became as it were fixed. Now all was fitful and temporary. Sheridan had just received the resignation of Mrs. Abington—one of the best of what was called the Garrick school; but he little dreamed what compensation was in store for him. It seems strange indeed how opportunely the great genius arises, exactly as the old attraction begins to flag. At such a nicely chosen moment came Garrick, to be succeeded by Kemble and Siddons, who, in their turn, were to give place to Kean and Miss O'Neil, with Macready to follow. Our own degenerate times have indeed failed to keep up the succession; but it is not too dreamy a theory to suppose that in the ranks of the British nation stands some undiscovered Garrick or Siddons, who, if great plays full of situation and vehement emotion came into fashion, would emerge and be brought to the front. At least this is certain, that no great actor, were such in existence, could have a chance of making an impression through the agency of the plays now popular. We shall now see how fortunate the new heroine was to be.

The ingenious Brinsley was not above those arts whose development has since turned the management

of the stage into a sort of handicraft. All those varieties of "puffs" on which he had been so merry and witty in his own burlesque were diligently scattered over the town, and were to be found in every newspaper that he could control. The announcement of her engagement was proclaimed at the foot of the playbills for weeks. From these exertions much no doubt was expected; but neither he nor the public was prepared for the tremendous *success* that was to follow.

The great actress herself tells the story of her hopes, fears, and final triumph, with a simplicity and modesty that is almost touching. With the persuasion of such vast gifts, she deserved all honour for her resignation and fortitude under what she conceived to have been unmerited oppression. As we have seen, for the sake of her children she set herself with sheer drudgery to confute the unjust verdict, and here was the moment at hand when the public was to confirm or to reverse its previous judgment.

Yet there were many reasons why she should despond. Even her best friends were doubtful: they believed, as she did herself, that her voice could not fill the great London house. But she was wonder-

fully encouraged. Old Sheridan, still alive, was full of the kindest interest in her. He it was that strongly urged the choice of *Isabella,* and the issue proved his sagacity. During the whole fortnight that she was in town preparing for the piece she was almost in a nervous fever. "No wonder," she says; "for my own fate and that of my little family hung upon it. I had quitted Bath, where all my efforts had been successful, and I feared lest a second failure in London might influence the public mind greatly to my prejudice in the event of my return from Drury Lane *disgraced as I had formerly been.*" These are genuine words; and there is still the old bitterness mingled with a certain pathos. Presently the rehearsals commenced. She herself gives the most graphic picture of the days that intervened. "Who can imagine my terror?" she writes. "I feared to utter a sound above an audible whisper, but by degrees enthusiasm cheered me into a forgetfulness of my fears, and I unconsciously threw out my voice, which failed not to be heard in the remotest part of the house, by a friend who kindly undertook to ascertain the happy circumstance. The countenances, no less than tears and flattering encouragements of my companions, emboldened me more and more; and the second rehearsal

was even more affecting than the first. Mr. King, who was then manager, was loud in his applauses. This second rehearsal took place on the 8th of October, 1782, and on the evening of that day I was seized with a nervous hoarseness, which made me extremely wretched; for I dreaded being obliged to defer my appearance on the 10th, longing, as I most earnestly did, at least to know the worst. I went to bed therefore in a state of dreadful suspense. Awaking the next morning, however, though out of restless, unrefreshing sleep, I found, upon speaking to my husband, that my voice was very much clearer. This of course was a great comfort to me; and moreover the sun, which had been completely obscured for many days, shone brightly through my curtains. I hailed it, though tearfully yet thankfully, as a happy omen; and even now I am not ashamed of this (as it may perhaps be called) childish superstition. On the morning of the 10th my voice was, most happily, perfectly restored; and again '*The blessed sun shone brightly on me.*' On this eventful day my father arrived to comfort me, and to be a witness of my trial. He accompanied me to my dressing-room at the theatre. There he left me; and I, in one of what I call my desperate tranquillities, which

usually impress me under terrific circumstances, there completed my dress, to the astonishment of my attendants, without uttering one word, though often sighing most profoundly."

But at one of the rehearsals an incident occurred which, though trifling enough, must have afforded her infinite encouragement. Her little boy, who was to be her little child in the piece, was so affected by her acting that he took the whole for reality, and burst into the most passionate floods of tears, thinking he was about to lose his mamma. This satisfactory proof of effect deeply impressed the actors and managers, and Sheridan had the story conveyed to friendly newspapers.

Isabella, the play chosen, is a fine though ponderous drama, full of gusts of passion, and the very deepest tragedy; and certainly, for any one gifted with the tragic powers of tenderness, grief, rage, nothing better could have been chosen. For our day it would be considered almost too lugubrious: yet in pieces of the kind, however disagreeable, there is a terrible reality and interest which fascinates. Everything was favourable. There was a vast house, crammed to the roof: an extraordinary excitement and curiosity. The best actors remaining of the best

school were to play with her—Smith, Palmer, Farren, and Packer. She had even the consoling support of old Roger Kemble, the old manager of strollers, who was utterly unnerved by the trial that was before his daughter. Though she had been acting now for years, her nervousness was only natural: it was a very different thing from the small Bath Theatre and its friendly audience. As she found herself on the stage she felt, she said, "the awful consciousness that one is the sole object of attention to that immense space, lined as it were with human intellect from top to bottom, and all around,—it may be imagined, but can never be described, and by me can never be forgotten!"

She had no need to be apprehensive. It was one continued triumph. As the pathetic piece moved on there was that one centre figure taking enthralling possession of the audience. The tenderness and exquisite sweetness of her tones went to every heart, the agony of suffering and grief thrilled all present. At times she had all men's eyes suffused with tears, and many women in actual hysterics. Towards the last act there was scarcely a speech of hers but what was interrupted by tumultuous and passionate bursts of applause, until the whole house seemed swept

away in transport. From that moment her success was assured in the most triumphant way.

Her own quiet and grateful description of the scene that followed is characteristic, and shows that she deserved such a triumph.

"I reached my own quiet fireside, on retiring from the scene of reiterated shouts and plaudits. I was half dead; and my joy and thankfulness were of too solemn and overpowering a nature to admit of words, or even tears. My father, my husband, and myself, sat down to a frugal neat supper, in a silence uninterrupted, except by exclamations of gladness from Mr. Siddons. My father enjoyed his refreshments; but occasionally stopped short, and, laying down his knife and fork, lifting up his venerable face, and throwing back his silver hair, gave way to tears of happiness. We soon parted for the night; and I, worn out with continually broken rest and laborious exertion, after an hour's retrospection (who can conceive the intenseness of that reverie?) fell into a sweet and profound sleep, which lasted to the middle of the next day. I arose alert in mind and body."

And yet this was the incompetent, uncertain, shrinking postulant who had all but failed in that very spot! But she had had seven years' hard train-

ing since: the fatality of a mistaken choice of characters was absent; so also was absent the restraint from the good-natured but patronizing instruction of Garrick; and the worse restraint of a band of fine actresses, justly proud of their own gifts, and intolerably jealous of interference. All these fatal conditions were now away; she stood alone, and, almost before appearing, had been admitted to a commanding position.

CHAPTER IX.

LONDON HOMAGE.

ON the next day the journals overflowed with her praises. They could hardly find words rapturous enough to do her justice. The clubs were in a commotion, as though some exciting event had taken place on the night before. All critics now bore testimony to the unspeakable tenderness of the performance. "She wore her sorrows and agonies with such a natural simplicity," said the *Morning Chronicle*, "that she arrested all attention." From the first moment she had this hold on her audience. Every one too was struck by her noble appearance, her graceful form, and fine eyes, the profile so classical, 'so grand, elegant, and striking.' "We join in the general joy," were the curious words, but which were no more than the truth, and only expressed the public feeling. The *Post* was curt and blunt, and while alluding to the unseemly puffing that heralded her coming, admitted that she had triumphed over

even this disadvantage, and was a great actress indeed. She had besides shown a thorough acquaintance with the stage. Some little blemishes, however, were pointed out — a sudden and inharmonious raising of the voice at emotional passages. The exhibition of grief was found a little monotonous, and showed itself in the same modes and shapes, whereas it should develope gradually, intermit, and be marked by breaks of joy and surprise, or a faltering gloom. Then again her passionate struggles were too "brisk and fluttering;" in tragic sorrows like hers, they should be slow and deliberate. There were not enough "pauses." The critic who objected to that harsh raising of her voice, owned fairly enough that this came of the advice of her friends, who had warned her against the cause of her former failure, namely, speaking too low. But these were mere specks; it had been a magnificent, tender, heart-rending performance. We can count perhaps but three of these dazzling first nights upon the English stage, and all were at Drury Lane; the first being Garrick's, in 1741; the second Mrs. Siddons', in 1782; and the third Edmund Kean's, in 1814. All these were of the same brilliant and tumultuous character.

But it may be fairly asked, is this the picture our

generation looks back to, that of a tender melting grief, exciting the most heartfelt pity and sympathy? Is not the popular image more that of a majestic and solemn grief, an awe-inspiring misery, which affects and harrows up? We might fancy that we were here reading an account of Mrs. Cibber's tender playing. The truth is, her brother's example, and almost proverbial solemnity, with her own softness in the same direction, began to assert their influence as she grew older; in fact, a long course of acting has always the effect of producing mannerism and staginess. She also, as she grew "full" and matronly, began to abandon these simply tender characters, and found more effect in Roman ones. So that the traditions of those who have seen her would reach chiefly to this later division of her life, when they would recal only her characters of dignity and majestic grief.

She did not forget her dear friends at Bath; an eager and excited letter was despatched to tell them the great news. "My dear, dear friend," she wrote to Dr. Whalley, "the trying moment is passed, and I am crowned with a success which far exceeds even my hopes. God be praised! I am extremely hurried, being obliged to dine at Linley's; have been at the rehearsal

of a new tragedy in prose, a most affecting play, in which I have a part I like very much. I believe my next character will be Zara in the *Mourning Bride.* My friend Pratt was, I believe in my soul, as much agitated, and is as much rejoiced as myself. As I know it will give you pleasure, I venture to assure you I never in my life heard such peals of applause. I thought they would not have suffered Mr. Packer to end the play. Oh, how I wished for you last night, to share a joy which was too much for me to bear alone! My poor husband was so agitated that he durst not venture near the house. I enclose an epilogue which my good friend wrote for me, but which I could not, from excessive fatigue of mind and body, speak. Never, never let me forget his goodness to me. I have suffered tortures for the unblest these three days and nights past, and believe I am not in perfect possession of myself at present; therefore excuse, my dear Mr. Whalley, the incorrectness of this scrawl, and accept it as the first tribute of love (after the decisive moment) from your ever grateful and truly affectionate, S. Siddons." It would be curious to put this letter beside the first one which described Garrick's success, and was sent down to Lichfield. The strain of delight is exactly similar.

She had now hardly a moment to spare from rehearsals and study.

On the next night of performance the effect was still more perfect. The very lobbies were lined with ladies and noblemen of the highest fashion: with Lady Shelburne, Lord North the politician, Lady Essex, and many more. Mr. Sheridan was to be seen with the Linley family, weeping in his box. Palmer, who acted Biron, did respectably: but his dress was ineffective—his coat and breeches, it was said, looking as if made out of an old blue window-curtain. Already she was meeting the obsequiousness that greets success; and instead of being led up a steep flight of stairs to a poor dressing-room, she was brought into a large one on the stage floor, which she found had been Garrick's. This discovery seemed a good omen; it gave her a new exultation. She looked in the very glass which "had so often reflected the face and form of that unequalled genius." But she had no need of such inspiration. The nervousness and excitement of the first night had passed away. A steady improvement was noticed in every successive performance. Even the critics remarked complacently that she had adopted all their hints. Night after night "ran" the play; night after night the house

was crammed. The papers were filled with paragraphs about Mrs. Siddons, her dress, and her movements, and with rumours that her salary was to be raised from 10*l.* to something more worthy of such attractions. Dressmakers thought it important to establish a claim in the papers of having made her dress. In this tide of delightful homage one voice of importance, the peculiar "yelp" as it were of Horace Walpole—it was scarcely a snarl—was raised in protest. She was all the *mode*, he said. He was questioned, of course—did he not think her the finest actress he had ever seen? He answered, "By no means." She had indeed a good figure and face, though her nose and chin were scarcely modelled after the true classic standard. He noted too that her hair was red, or at least had the look of redness, through the use of powder of that colour. She had a clear good voice; but still it wanted modulation and variety, and a natural familiarity. He remarked also, what some of the critics had found fault with, that the motion of her arms was "not genteel"—no doubt alluding to a fashion she had of throwing them behind her back suddenly, which seemed awkward to some, and original to others. Finally, he dismissed her with the faint praise that she did no more than

instruction or good sense might do. A great deal of this depreciation came of course from his practice of dissenting from the public fashion of furores, and precisely after the same principle, "he could see nothing" in Garrick's playing. It was enough that the town was "horn mad" after any one or anything to insure his protest.

The Bath dilettanti were at this time much concerned for their dramatist, Pratt; later indeed they were to have a dramatic milkwoman, whose play they forced on the local stage. Miss Weston, of that town, rejoiced in "the divine Melpomene's popularity, but poor Benignus, what a hard fate!" His piece had got as far as the door of Drury Lane; but they would not allow the actress to take part in it. "I cannot help thinking she might and *ought* to do him this service." She had already sacrificed herself to a dull piece, called *The Fatal Interview*, which had really done her reputation injury. She herself was writing to her dear friends at Bath, telling them all her plans and prospects, in the same frank fashion.

"Just at this moment are you, my dear sir," she wrote from No. 149, Strand, on November 20, "sitting down to supper, and 'every guest's a friend.' Oh! that I were with you but for one half hour. 'Oh! God forbid!'

says my dear Mrs. Whalley; 'for he would talk so loud and so fast, that he would throw himself into a fever, and die of unsatisfied curiosity into the bargain.' Do I flatter myself, my dear sir? Oh no! you have both done me the honour to assure me that you love me, and I would not forego the blessed idea for the world. Your letter to poor Pratty is lying on the table by me, and I am selfish enough to grudge it him from the bottom of my heart, and yet I will not; for just now, poor soul, he wants much comfort, therefore let him take it, and God bless him with it! You have heard of the laurel which the gentlemen of the bar have adorned my brows with, no doubt. It is indeed an honour I could not have hoped to arrive at; but (in the sincerity of truth I speak it) not half so grateful to my soul as that sweet wreath with which your friendly hand encircled my humble head. I wish, for your honour more than my own, the subject was more worthy of your commendations; but indeed your esteem confers a value wherever it is placed. I hope you don't forget, my dear sir, that you are to give me your picture.

"I did receive all your letters, and thank you for them a thousand times: one line of them is worth all the acclamations of ten thousand shouting theatres.

The Fatal Interview has been played three times, and is quite done with: it was the dullest of all representations. Pratty's Epilogue was vastly applauded indeed. I shall take care how I get into such another play; but I fancy the managers will take care of that too. *They wont let me play in Pratty's comedy.*" This was a happy deliverance. No one was ever so pestered by taxes in this shape.

One of the most characteristic tributes to her excellence is to find the *fade* refinements of a romantic "blue" like Miss Seward, swept away like so many cobwebs by the tremendous powers of the actress. On her road to town the poetess was writing, "Oh, pardon this disobedience to the kind solicitude that charms me. . . . the congeniality of our sentiments assures me you have discovered *that souls are created in classes*," *&c.* "It was impossible then that the wreath of amity should not fade," &c., with more in the same strain. But when she got to town the spell of an honest enthusiasm and delight began to work.

"My dear friends," she wrote, "I arrived here at five. Think of my mortification! Mrs. Siddons in *Belvidera* to-night, as is supposed for the last time before she lies in. I asked Mrs. Barrow if it would be impossible to get into the pit. 'O heaven!' said

she, 'impossible in any part of the house!' Mrs. B. is, I find, in the *petit-souper* circle; so the dear plays, oratorios, &c., will be a little too much for my wishes, out of question. Adieu! adieu! O that Sophia were to be of our party in the pleasant week to which I look forward!"

And again, in genuine excitement she wrote: "From the midst of hurries, which even surpass my formidable dread of their excess, let me snatch a few minutes to send my beloved and excelling friend a few hasty and grateful lines by the most glorious of her sex. Powers which surpass every idea I had formed of their possibility, press so forcibly upon my recollection, that my pen has more than once stood still upon my paper, transfixed by the consciousness how poor and inadequate are all words to paint my Siddonian idolatry. Every attempt fruitless to procure boxes, I saw her for the first time, at the hazard of my life, by struggling through the terrible, fierce, maddening crowd into the pit. She only could have recompensed the terrors and dangers of the attempt; and the recompense was full! She far outstrips that ideal perfection which, through life, I have vainly searched for in the theatre. Her energy, her pathos, her majestic scorn, is inspired by the same sensibility and nobleness

of soul which produces all the varied expressions of these passions in Giovanni's singing, and casts the Yates, the Crawfords, and the Youngs to the same immeasurable distance, at which he throws every other singer in the world. I have seen her in *Jane Shore* and in *Calista*—conceive with what rapture, for it is impossible to describe it. I am as devoted to her as yourself, and my affection keeps pace with my astonishment and delight; for I have conversed with her, hung upon every word which fell from that charming lip; but I never felt myself so awed in my life. The most awkward embarrassment was the consequence."

The "laurel" with which the barristers adorned her "brows" was a most substantial, and at the same time graceful, compliment. One hundred barristers subscribed a guinea each for her benefit, and sent it to her by Mr. Fielding and Mr. Pigott. She acknowledged it modestly and gratefully, speaking of her "poor abilities," and calling it the "most shining circumstance of her life." Actors of the present time may look back wistfully to this gratifying shape of compliment; to the "gold tickets" on benefit nights. Miss Seward describes her battle for places with humour.

"Fortune favours the spirited. No box to be procured for *Venice Preserved.* I prevailed with my

little Jessica to whirl down to the playhouse, and, under the protection of her brother, to wait in the lobby for the chance of giving-up places. The romance of the hope was finely scouted by Mr. Barugh and others; but I persisted, and we ventured. A gentleman of Mrs. B.'s train accidentally popped us, before the play began, into places a man was keeping in the fifth row of the front boxes, on our promise of retiring if they were claimed before the first act was over, after which we should, by the rule of the house, have a right to keep them. Oh! even when the siren spoke, with all her graces and melting tones, I wished to have the speech over, so ardently did I long for the moment when possession for the night might become secure. Our stars fought for us, the act was over, the box-keeper retired with a shilling reward for not bustling us, and in a second the people who had taken the places claimed them! Vain was their claim; our beaux asserted our right to keep them, and keep them we did. But time flies, and words could but feebly shadow forth the yearnings of my soul that night; my tears flowed in full and ceaseless streams. Her superhuman powers have been so strictly just to every character she has represented, that I find it impossible to pronounce in which she is greatest; yet

if some friend was to say to me, I am only to see Mrs. Siddons in one character, and if this friend was a being capable of discerning and strongly feeling all her excellences, and was to leave to me the choice of the character, I should say Calista, because, though less soul-harrowing than Belvidera, it exhibits such a conflicting and sublime variety of passions."

After eight nights of *Isabella* it was time that a change should be made, and the new actress appeared in Murphy's *Grecian Daughter*, a stilted ponderous play, but with a good substantial basis for tragic powers to work on. Here again was a fresh success. The character was seen to be different, and though oppressed with gloom, was marked by a certain heroic exultation which made it distinct. Not long before Barry had touched all hearts with his *Evander*, and with all its blemishes, it was a touching and pathetic piece, and did not deserve the strange description applied to it by one of the papers, an "abortion of Melpomene."

Then followed *Jane Shore*, which threw some of the audience into hysterics violent as ever Whitefield excited. Calista, Belvidera, and Zara, characters all in the same "line," and therefore likely to produce an impression of monotony, followed.

And it is a great testimony to her genius, that not so much as a hint of such an effect was ever even whispered. In *Euphrasia* Mrs. Yates, at the other house, deliberately challenged the town to decide between them; but even were the older actress's merits greater, it was folly in her to have the matter decided at such a time of enthusiasm. Mrs. Siddons might now indeed smile as she thought of the time when this lady and her companions tried to stand before her in *The Jubilee*.

Yet she was not in the least "overset" by all this applause, which would have "turned" many an actress's head. In the flush of these triumphs she might be excused for addressing the public in a letter which showed how elated she was by her success.

"Mrs. Siddons would not have remained so long without expressing the high sense she had of the great honours done her at her late benefit, but that after repeated trials she could not find words adequate to her feelings, and she must at present be content with the plain language of a grateful mind—that her heart thanks all her benefactors for the distinguished, and she fears, too partial encouragement which they bestowed on this occasion. She is told that the splendid appearance on that night, and the emolu-

ments arising from it, exceed anything ever recorded on a similar account in the annals of the English stage; but she has not the vanity to imagine that this arose from any superiority over many of her predecessors, or some of her contemporaries. She attributes it wholly to that liberality of sentiment which distinguishes the inhabitants of this great metropolis from those of any other in the world. They know her story—they know that for many years, by a strange fatality, she was confined to move in a narrow sphere, in which the rewards attendant on her labours were proportionally small. With a generosity unexampled, they proposed at once to balance the account, and pay off the arrears due, according to the rate, the too partial rate, at which they valued her talents. She knows the danger arising from extraordinary and unmerited favours, and will carefully guard against any approach of pride, too often their attendant. Happy shall she esteem herself, if by the utmost assiduity, and constant exertion of her poor abilities, she shall be able to lessen, though hopeless ever to discharge, the vast debt she owes the public."

The managers were eager to favour one who was restoring the fortunes of their house so marvellously,

and allowed her two benefits during her first season, giving her up besides their own six reserved boxes, and not charging the expenses of the house. This was really equivalent to a present in money of about 250*l.* But they might well afford to be generous. The second benefit brought her 650*l.* So that, calculating roughly, her profits during that first season must have brought her about 1500*l.* This was a change from the slender pittance earned at Bath and Bristol, and earned in so toilsome a fashion.

Honours too and "patronage" came to her abundantly. The street before her lodgings in the Strand was crowded with the coaches of the nobility coming to call upon her. And from that time, during the course of a long life, the friendship of titled people was always hers to an extraordinary degree. The King and the Royal Family took the deepest interest in her. She had hardly a moment that she could call her own.

"Believe me, my dear sir," she wrote to Dr. Whalley, "it is not want of inclination, but opportunity, that prevents my more frequent acknowledgments; but need I tell you this? No; you generously judge of my heart by your own. I fear I must have appeared very insensible, and therefore

unworthy the honour Miss Seward has done me; but the perpetual round of business in which I am engaged is incredible. Shall I trespass on your goodness to say that I feel as I ought on that occasion? I believe I told you that the Queen had graciously put my son down on her list for the Charterhouse; and she has done me the honour to stamp my reputation by her honoured approbation. They have seen me in all my characters but Isabella, which they have commanded for Monday next; but having seen me in *Jane Shore* last night, and judging very humanely that too quick repetitions of such exertions may injure my health, the King himself most graciously sent to the managers, and said he must deny himself the pleasure of seeing *Isabella* till Tuesday. This is the second time he has distinguished me in this manner. You see a vast deal of me in the papers, of my appointment at court, and the like. All groundless: but I have the pleasure to inform you that my success has exceeded even my hopes. My sister is engaged, and is successful; God be praised for all his mercies! You will think me an egotist, I fear. I shall certainly be at Bath in the Passion Week, if I am alive; I count the hours till then. I pray most fervently for the success of our

friend's comedy; it does not come out till Wednesday. I never wished more for a splendid fortune than I do on his account. Remember me very kindly to all my friends, and tell my dear Mrs. Whalley she is in 'my heart's core, yea, in my heart of hearts.' I am ever your grateful and affectionate S. Siddons."

She was sitting for her picture to Hamilton, and the eagerness to see this dramatic though mournful picture was incredible. The carriages blocked up the street before the artist's house, and the fine ladies found themselves melting into tears as they stood before it. It is undoubtedly a touching and graceful picture, and it is worth while contrasting it with those more intellectual portraits of her by Reynolds and Lawrence. Sadness and feeling are in every line of this touching face.

In June this arduous first season had closed; when for about eighty nights she had been wailing and mourning and raging through all the gamut of histrionic affliction. The wear and tear of such exertion must be prodigious, and an actress may well wish that her nerves were "made of cartropes." But she was not going to rest, as would have been judicious, but was starting on a laborious country tour, after which she was to visit Dublin.

CHAPTER X.

SUCCESS AT DUBLIN.

AT Dublin not yet had been forgotten the triumphs of Garrick, now little more than five and thirty years before, when his splendid playing with Woffington made a sort of fête or gala for the whole city. But there was a brilliancy and vivacity about *him*, an animation and versatility, which drew hearts as well as intellects, and specially suited the Irish humour. Even now it is impossible to pass by the alleys and lanes which skirt the small fragment that remains of Smock Alley Theatre without thinking of those triumphant and glittering nights.

Kemble had now appeared, and the new actor's success was not extraordinary. He was later admired, and followed, and his lofty declamation brought tragedies once more into fashion. It was pronounced that he was a natural and original actor, which shows that he had not settled into that deliberate solemnity which was to be so characteristic of him. His

voice too was weak and thick, yet he was given full credit for his skilful management, through which he gave to it all the necessary variety. But an admirable and intelligent criticism, which was sent over in a letter from Dublin, seems to give a truthful picture of all his excellences and blemishes.* "His tones," it says, "are least of all adapted to the expression of extreme tenderness or violent grief, though sometimes they have reached both successfully; but oftener the former passion raises them into a sort of whine and the latter sinks them into a smothered and inaudible murmur. There is hardly any such thing as speaking accurately of his deportment. In the same character it shall be free and graceful one night, and the next constrained and distorted. I cannot imagine the cause of this disparity, but truth is truth; and I say of Mr. Kemble's action that it is as graceful and ungraceful as any man's I ever saw in my life. His countenance is most powerful; the passions live in his features. *His understanding puts him in full possession of his author's spirit, and often enables him to give to scenes, especially Shakspeare's, a new and emphatical grace.*"

* See "Gentleman's Magazine," 1783.

His characters in comedy were put aside as of very little moment. His best tragic characters were considered to be Hamlet, and the Count of Narbonne; there he quite rose above himself. Specially excellent were his Sir Giles, Demetrius, Beverley, Orestes, Richard, Macbeth, and the Earl of Warwick. But in truth he committed the error of being too promiscuous in his choice, and diffused his talents over too vast a range of parts.* Garrick was far wiser. But Captain Jephson's new and romantic play, *The Count of Narbonne*, was in great favour with his countrymen, and Kemble had to play it no less than thirty times to his Dublin audience.

The theatre at Smock Alley was one of the handsomest in the empire, and remarkable for what was then a novelty, a drop scene, with a view of the Houses of Parliament, instead of the conventional green curtain. The manager, Daly, belonged to the

* What man could do justice to such a prodigious variety of characters? He played Hamlet, Earl of Essex, Earl of Warwick, Iago, King Charles, Osman, Richard III., Leon, Alexander, Shylock, Orestes, the Black Prince, Bajazet, Glenalvon, Philaster, Beverley, Biron, Edgar, Juba, Philotas, Roman Actor, Othello, Mark Antony, Horatio, Romeo, Osmyn, Jaffier, Macbeth, Sir Giles Overreach, King John, Demetrius, Morcar, Oroonoko, Achmet, Henry V., Sir G. Touchwood, Hastings, and the Count of Narbonne: no less than thirty-eight characters!

race of Dublin managers, who were usually gentlemen by birth, had lived adventurous lives, and had had a liberal education. Such were always received at Dublin Castle in virtue of their office; while this patronage elevated the stage, and gave it a prestige. Mr. Daly had been a fellow commoner in Trinity College; and had effected a violent introduction behind the scenes, bursting into Miss Pope's dressing-room, at the head of a party of collegians. He was a very handsome man, but was excitable and quarrelsome, and was considered too eager to thrust his own merits on the public.* A local satirist thus described him:—

> "A Ranger tortured to a thousand shapes,
> A Doricourt made up of bows and scrapes,
> A Zaphna plundered of his native mien,
> To shake incessant like a mandarin.
> 'Tis oft with indignation I behold
> Thee, Daly, in thy great success grown bold:
> In every play the foremost parts retain,
> To please thyself, while others feel the pain."

He was married to a good actress, Miss Barsanti,

* His friend O'Keefe gives a good sketch of him at *The Castle of Andalusia* in London, which the manager had just produced at Dublin. He could hardly restrain himself, and was every moment starting up with the interruption, "That's not the way *my fellow* did that:" "I made my fellow do it in quite a different fashion."

whose name is familiar to readers of theatrical memoirs.

By this gentleman Kemble was treated liberally, and received the highest salary of the house—viz., five pounds a week, which was the same Mrs. Siddons had received at Drury Lane. The new actor made his *début* on November 2, 1781, a short time after the theatre opened. His playing was greatly admired, and he produced a still greater effect on the second night. But the perverse choice of the manager had nearly shipwrecked all his prospects; for he was put into a genteel comedy part, in the *Belle's Stratagem*. The audience, who came full of an eager curiosity, went away disappointed, and perhaps disgusted. Alexander the Great, however, helped to restore his prestige, and the new play of *The Count of Narbonne*, by Captain Jephson, as we have seen, caused a perfect furore. That clever and agreeable Castle equerry, whose company was much sought, and whose plays had been patronized by Mr. Garrick, was delighted with this interpretation, and attended all the rehearsals. He introduced Kemble to his own intimate "set," to Mr. Tighe, Courtenay, and others. In that jovial Irish society Kemble was least likely of all men to lose his composure, though he could be

convivial enough. In the cast of the characters was a Miss Francis, who then attracted little notice, but who was later to be celebrated as the vivacious Mrs. Jordan. Early in the following year arrived Miss Younge, who had "created the part" in Jephson's play, as the phrase runs, at London; and with such assistance the acting at Smock Alley became doubly attractive. The two artists played a round of tragedies together, and at the close of the season started for Cork. But the recollection of Barry and Mossop was still fresh, and the new player was received but coldly.

Now appeared the veteran Mrs. Crawford, who confused her admirers by her frequent changes of name, once being Mrs. Dancer, then Mrs. Barry, and finally Mrs. Crawford. The old magical days had long since passed away, when with her "silver-tongued" husband she enchanted all the town. She was decayed, even ridiculous from this third marriage with a young man, and was actually preparing herself for a contest with the great new actress who had dethroned her and so many others. Her failing powers could do little to keep up the attraction of the rival Dublin house, and joining Kemble they both played in some of the old and stilted pieces. He had

thus every advantage, and it was no wonder that he made a deep impression. He appeared in Limerick, then returned to Dublin to open the new season of 1783. Digges, another veteran, with Mrs. Inchbald, were now of the company. Again a fresh incident was to favour him, and the news of the extraordinary success of his sister in London naturally added to his prestige.*

Daly, the manager, seems to have disliked both brother and sister. We can quite conceive how little their characters would have suited. Very soon it was known that Kemble had passed through the ordeal which was *de rigueur* in a country where an affirmative answer was expected from every "man of honour" to the question, "Had he ever blazed?" A quarrel took place between the manager and the actor: the former, who was playing Doricourt, finding fault with Kemble's want of spirit in Sir George Touchwood, and which interfered with the effect of his character. From what we know of Kemble's style of comedy, it may be imagined that there were reasonable grounds for the expostulation.

* Mr. Boaden was told that at a dinner in the Castle, Lord Inchiquin gave as a toast "the matchless Mrs. Siddons," and sent her brother a ring containing her miniature, set in diamonds.

Kemble resented this characteristically. He went away, changed his dress, and refused to appear until the manager had asked his pardon for the affront. Such a demand to an Irish gentleman could meet with but one reply, and a duel took place, but with no fatal result. There was a cold air of superiority in both the great Kembles—a calm, resolute adherence to their own interests, which was distasteful to the free, careless, open-hearted company he was now among. We may be sure too there was no possibility of "gaining a point" with either. It is certainly not a little remarkable that a woman of such powers should have invariably failed to impress favourably her various managers. Garrick had been lukewarm, though just, in his dealings towards her; Palmer did not care to retain her; Sheridan, as will be seen, after his first raptures, was not cordial; and the two Irish managers exhibited a marked dislike towards her that could scarcely be kept from an open quarrel. There must have been here a want of tact, a coldness or haughtiness in her nature, that repelled.

Daly had gone over specially to engage her at the close of her first brilliant season, and though she was pressed with many provincial offers she determined to postpone all to the importance of an appearance

in the Irish capital. She started in July with a small party, consisting of Brereton, her husband, and her sister. She herself tells the story of their adventures in a letter to her friend Whalley with much animation.

"I thank you a thousand and a thousand times," she wrote from Dublin on July 14th, "for your dear letter; but you don't mention having heard from me since you left England. We rejoice most sincerely that you are arrived without any material accident, without any dangerous ones I mean, for to be sure some of them were very *materially* entertaining. Oh, how I laugh whenever the drowsy adventure comes across my imagination, for 'more was meant than met the ear.' I am sure I would have given the world to have seen my dear Mrs. Whalley upon the little old tub. How happy you are in your descriptions! So she was very well; then very jocular she must be. I think her conversation, thus enthroned and thus surrounded, must have been the highest treat in all the world. Some parts of your tour must have been enchanting. How good it was of you to wish me a partaker of your pastoral dinner! Be assured, my dear, dear friends, no one can thank you more sincerely, or be more sensible of

the honour of your regard, though many may deserve it better. What a comfortable thing to meet with such agreeable people! But society and converse like yours and my dear Mrs. Whalley's must very soon make savages agreeable. How did poor little Paphy bear it? Did she remonstrate in her usual melting tones? I am sure she was very glad to be at rest, which does not happen in a carriage, I remember, for any length of time. I can conceive nothing so provoking or ridiculous as the Frenchman's politeness, and poor Vincent's perplexity. You will have heard, long ere this reaches you, that our sweet D. is safely delivered of a very fine girl, which I know will give you no small pleasure. Now for myself. Our journey was delightful; the roads through Wales present you with mountains unsurmountable, the grandest and the most beautiful prospects to be conceived; but I want your pen to describe them.

"We got very safe to Holyhead, and then I felt as if some great event was going to take place, having never been on sea. I was awed, but not terrified; feeling myself in the hands of a great and powerful God, 'whose mercy is over all His works.' The sea was particularly rough; we were lifted mountains

high, and sank again as low in an instant. Good God! how tremendous, how wonderful! A pleasing terror took hold on me, which it is impossible to describe, and I never felt the majesty of the Divine Creator so fully before. I was dreadfully sick, and so were my poor sister and Mr. Brereton. Mr. Siddons was pretty well; and here, my dear friend, let me give you a little wholesome advice; allways (you see I have forgot to spell) go to bed the instant you go on board, for by lying horizontally, and keeping very quiet, you cheat the sea of half its influence. We arrived in Dublin the 16th of June, half-past twelve at night. There is not a tavern or a house of any kind in this capital city of a rising kingdom, as they call themselves, that will take a woman in; and do you know I was obliged, after being shut up in the Custom-house officer's room, to have the things examined, which room was more like a dungeon than anything else—after staying here above an hour and a half, I tell you I was obliged, sick and weary as I was, to wander about the streets on foot (for the coaches and chairs were all gone off the stands) till almost two o'clock in the morning, raining too as if heaven and earth were coming together. A pretty beginning! thought I;

but these people are a thousand years behind us in every respect. At length Mr. Brereton, whose father had provided a bed for him on his arrival, ventured to say he would insist on having a bed for us at the house where he was to sleep. Well, we got to this place, and the lady of the house vouchsafed, after many times telling us that she never took in ladies, to say we should sleep there that night. I never was so weary and so disgusted in my life.

"The city of Dublin is a sink of filthiness; the noisome smells, and the multitudes of shocking and most miserable objects, made me resolve never to stir out but to my business. I like not the people either; they are all ostentation and insincerity, and in their ideas of finery very like the French, but not so cleanly; and they not only speak but think coarsely. This is in confidence; therefore, your fingers on your lips, I pray. They are tenacious of their country to a degree of folly that is very laughable, and would call me the blackest of ingrates were they to know my sentiments of them. I have got a thousand pounds among them this summer. I always acknowledge myself obliged to them, but I cannot love them. I know but one among them that can in any degree atone for the barbarism of the

rest, who thinks there are other means of expressing esteem besides forcing people to eat and to drink, the doing which to a most offensive degree they call Irish hospitality. I long to be at home, sitting quietly in the little snug parlour, where I had last the pleasure, or rather the pain, of seeing you that night. For the first time in my life I wished not to see you. I dreaded it, and with reason. I knew (which was the case) I should not recover that cruel farewell for several days. Oh! my dear friend, do the pleasures of life compensate for the pangs? I think not. Some people place the whole happiness of life in the pleasures of imagination, in building castles; for my part, I am not one that build very magnificent ones—nay, I don't build any castles, but cottages without end. May the great Disposer of all events but permit me to spend the evening of my toilsome bustling day in a cottage, where I may sometimes have the converse and society, which will make me more worthy those imperishable habitations which are prepared for the spirits of just men made perfect! Yes, let me take up my rest in this world near my beloved Langford. You know this has been my castle any time these four years, and I am making a little snug party. Mr. Nott and my dear sister I

have secured, and make no doubt of gaining a few others. Is not this a delightful scheme?

"I have played for one charity since I have been here (I am now at Cork, I should tell you), and am to play for another to-morrow—your favourite Zara, in the *Mourning Bride*. I am extremely happy that you like your little companion so well.* I have sat to a young man in this place, who has made a small full-length of me in *Isabella*, upon the first entrance of Biron. You will think this an arduous undertaking, but he has succeeded to admiration. I think it more like me than any I have ever yet seen. I am sure you would be delighted with it. I never was so well in my life as I have been in Ireland; but, God be praised, I shall set out for dear England next Tuesday.

"This letter has been begun this month, and finished by a line or two at a time, so you'll find it a fine scrawl; and I am still so mere a matter-of-fact body, as to despair of giving you the least entertainment. I can boast no other claim to the honour and happiness of your correspondence than a very sincere affection for you both, joined with the most perfect esteem for

* Mrs. Siddons refers here to the miniature of herself, the engraving of which is given.

your most amiable qualities, and great talent. Say all that's kind for us to my dear Mrs. W., and believe me, ever your most affectionate S. SIDDONS."

"Cork, August 29th.

"I hope you will give me the pleasure of hearing from you soon."

"London, October 7th, 1783.

"For God's sake, my dear friends, pray for my memory. I had forgot to pay the postage, as you kindly desired, and this poor letter has been wandering about the world ever since I left Cork. It was opened in Ireland, you see, so I must never show my face there again. The King commands *Isabella* tomorrow, and I play Jane Shore on Saturday. I have affronted Mrs. Jackson by not being able to procure her places. I am extremely sorry for it, as I had the highest esteem for herself, and her friendship to you had tied her close to my heart. I have done all I could to reinstate myself in her favour, but in vain. Poor Mr. Nott has been in great trouble; he has lost a brother lately that was more nearly allied than by blood, and for whose loss he is inconsolable. He is not in town, but I hope soon to see him. Adieu!

Mr. Siddons, &c., desire kindest wishes. The last letter I wrote to you I was very near serving in the same manner. Is it not a little alarming? I fear I shall be superannuated in a few years."

In this pleasant narrative it was evident that her impression had been not a little coloured by the inconveniences which had attended her first arrival. Her remarks on the character of the people are severe, and a little ungracious; but whatever was their truth at that time, she could hardly complain if the Irish repaid her want of sympathy with a hostility that reached across the Channel to Drury Lane. The letter indeed reflected dissensions of the Dublin Theatre, and her own quarrels with the manager and the press.

She made her first appearance on the 21st of June, 1783, in *Isabella*. The terms were handsome.* The approaches were crowded before three o'clock; and persons of the first condition offered guineas and

* There is some obscurity as to their exact amount. Mr. Boaden stating she was to receive 600*l.* for a limited number of nights; Lee Lewes affirming that she was to share the house, after deducting sixty pounds expenses.

half-guineas to be admitted to the pit or gallery. The criticisms were in a tone of perfect rapture over her face, figure, and tones.

But at Crow Street Theatre Mrs. Crawford—in her line an actress of extraordinary merit, whose playing was founded on the finest traditions—soon boldly challenged the rival who had so completely dethroned her. No situation can be imagined more mortifying than the abrupt deposition which seems nearly always to be the fate reserved for an old public favourite. A gradual change might be looked for, and submitted to, as in the order of things; but the public nature cannot be expected to pay this graceful homage to good feeling and decency. Such sudden desertion is indeed evidence of bad taste; for even Mrs. Siddons, with all her genius, could not have had the experience or the valuable teachings of Garrick and his school which the older actress enjoyed. It is infinitely to the credit and taste of the Irish that after following the new artist, and doing her every justice, they divided their approbation with their older servant, and Mrs. Crawford, carrying on the contest with wonderful spirit, found herself attended by "houses" that far exceeded her rival's. A writer in that curious miscellany the "European Magazine," indeed states

that, after the first few nights her attractions began to fail, in spite of the exertions of Mr. Daly, who was deeply skilled in the arts of "puffing" and advertising. It may be suspected that she offended her audience: and a burlesque account of the performance had a prodigious circulation, was reprinted in England, and heartily enjoyed by the profession. It was attributed to Digges, whom she had offended and made her bitter enemy.

"On Saturday Mrs. Siddons, about whom all the world has been talking, exposed her beautiful adamantine, soft, and comely person, for the first time, in the Theatre Royal, Smock Alley. The house was crowded with hundreds more than it could hold, with thousands of admiring spectators that went away without a sight. . . . She was nature itself—she was the most exquisite work of art. . . . Several fainted, even before the curtain drew up. . . . The fiddlers in the orchestra blubbered like hungry children crying for their bread and butter; and when the bell rang for music between the acts, the tears ran from the bassoon player's eyes in such showers that they choked the finger stops, and, making a spout of the instrument, poured in such a torrent upon the first fiddler's book; but not seeing the overture was in two sharps, the

leader of the band actually played in two flats; but the sobs and sighs of the groaning audience, and the noise of the corks drawn from the smelling-bottles, prevented the mistake being discovered. . . . The briny pond in the pit was three feet deep, and the people that were obliged to stand upon the benches, were in that position up to their ankles in tears. An Act of Parliament against her playing will certainly pass, for she has infected the volunteers, and they sit reading *The Fatal Marriage*, crying and roaring all the time. May the curses of an insulted nation pursue the gentlemen of the College, the gentlemen of the Bar, and the Peers and Peeresses that hissed her on the second night. True it is that Mr. Garrick never could make anything of her, and pronounced her below mediocrity; true it is the London audience did not like her. But what of that?"

This sort of ridicule would have been specially offensive to one of her nature, and it helps to explain her disagreeable impressions of the country, which contrast strangely with her rapturous memories of her "dear Edinburgh." This was her first season there; but she was to repeat her visits very frequently, though on the whole, I think, they were not as profitable as her other ventures.

Another actress with whom Kemble played in Dublin was Miss Philips, afterwards the beautiful Mrs. Crouch. This young lady had come to Dublin with a recommendation from no less a person than Dr. Johnson. "The bringer of this letter," he wrote to Windham, then secretary, "is the father of Miss Philips, a singer, who comes to try her voice on the stage at Dublin. Mr. Philips is one of my old friends, and I am of opinion that neither he nor his daughter will do anything that can disgrace their benefactors." In the city she had prodigious success; her voice and beauty produced a furore. Mr. Kemble paid her great attention; and it was presently given out that there was an engagement between them; "but, I believe," says Mr. Boaden, cautiously, "Miss Philips neither received nor desired any attentions from Mr. Kemble but those of very zealous friendship, perhaps a little romantic on his side."

Kemble when playing with her at Cork was able to prove his "spirit" on a second occasion, and in even a more satisfactory way than at first. Her father was laid up with gout, and had asked Kemble to attend her home from the theatre. A party of disorderly militia officers, at the head of whom was Lord Muskerry, insisted on escorting her

home, and waited at her dressing-room door. She sent to Kemble for protection, who, taking his sword, said to them with much firmness and dignity, that he had been requested by her father to take care of Miss Philips; and he hoped, that, as gentlemen, they would not interfere with his trust, which he was determined to carry out. He then asked Miss Philips to come out, and rely on him. Further, that he would meet any of the gentlemen in the morning, and if they could *prove* him wrong, he would apologize. The officers allowed them to pass, but followed them, when one of the party, who was tipsy, made a cut at Kemble, which a servant girl courageously parried. The actor was quite cool, and brought his charge home in safety. On the next morning the commanding officer came to Mr. Philips with his excuses, and assured him that apologies should be made to the young lady. She herself, however, good humouredly laughed the matter off, and said that all that was necessary was that the gentlemen should leave the theatre with the rest of the audience, and let her return by herself. Mr. Kemble's behaviour on the occasion was greatly extolled for its spirit and dignity. Such an adventure ought to have led to what is called "a warmer feeling" on his part

towards the heroine; and it was universally agreed that her protector would surely marry the heroine.

An actor named Bernard happened to be in Ireland about this time, and describes pleasantly the theatrical life of the day. A party was made up under Daly's direction to proceed to the country in the summer, consisting of the manager and his future wife, Miss Barsanti, the two Kembles, Miss Younge, Digges, Miss Phillips, and a lady who went by the name of Mrs. Melmoth. She had been carried off by Pratt, the Bath Dellacruscan, who had made his advances under the romantic title of "Courtney Melmoth." The adventures of the party were amusing. Amid these quaint humours Kemble's figure is prominent for dignity and good-nature; and he is seen helping distressed actors with "five guineas," with valuable letters of introduction, and other aids.

Bernard tells of the jester of the party, one Bowles, producing at dinner a skull, which he had carried off from a churchyard, as a "property" for Hamlet. Kemble's shocked face and tone of voice is well described. "Really—er—Mr. Bowles—if you go on—er—in this way, it will be dangerous to travel with you." Kemble was a member of one of the Dublin Volunteer Corps.

CHAPTER XI.

KEMBLE'S FIRST APPEARANCE IN LONDON.

IT was curious that while the English stage, at the time Kemble made his first appearance in London, abounded in excellent comedians like Smith, Palmer, King, Bensley, and Parsons, there should have been left but one tragic actor of any pretension—namely, Henderson. Even his powers seem to have been overrated; he never touched the heart of the town. He was a mannerist; and the idea of his being a rival to Garrick arose chiefly from the partisanship of the time. As it was, his career was shortly to close, so that the new actor, like his more fortunate sister, rose just in time to fill what might have been an irretrievable blank. Though here might arise the speculation whether such a void might not, as it were, have "forced," or developed, some actor of power and merit, who without this pressure could not have made his way to the front: thus in case there had been no Kemble, whether Holman, for instance, might not

have been stimulated, encouraged, and petted into excellence. A further speculation might be added: whether Kemble himself, with some actor of genius like Kean in the possession of the attention and enthusiasm of the town, would have had the power of making so deep an impression. We may be inclined to believe that he would not, as the impression that he did make at first was not of the brilliant and overwhelming character which attended on his more gifted sister.

It was curious that only a few days before his appearance, his brother Stephen should have been put forward in *Othello* at Covent Garden. The mean partisanship of the time affected to see in this step an attempt to forestall or confuse the public judgment; and a vulgar story was circulated as to a mistake having been actually committed in engaging the wrong brother at Dublin.* Newspaper writing at this time was full of this partisanship, and its criticism was something to be dreaded, it was so unsparing. There was besides a dreadful system of letter-writing

* It was said that the managers had even sent to engage "the great" Mr. Kemble, and that the largest and tallest had been secured. This story was authoritatively contradicted on the part of Mr Harris, the manager of Covent Garden.

to the editor, which became a convenient vehicle, for the grossest personality was used.*

All newspapers, however, did not open their columns to such scoundrels. The *Morning Chronicle* was directed by the severe but just Woodfall, who was to be seen on the first night of a new play, in the front row of the pit, looking on with a special austerity. On such an occasion too was observed Twiss, later to marry one of Kemble's sisters, and who was supposed to write those critical letters to the editor in which his future brother-in-law's merits were nicely and accurately discussed. There was the *Morning Post*, with the muscular Parson Bate—theatre-goer, bruiser, duellist, dramatical critic—anything but the clergyman, which he was by title at least. And there was also the *Public Advertiser*, in which another eccentric parson, Este, "wrote up" his friends laboriously,

* While collecting materials for these volumes, I came by accident on what perhaps is the most satisfactory proof yet offered of Foote's innocence of the dreadful charge brought against him at the close of his life. A fellow, who signed himself "Curtius," disturbed Garrick's last hours by threatening to write some letters to the papers, in which some mysterious charges were to be brought against Garrick's character. Garrick was weak enough to try and negotiate, but death saved him from further annoyance. The signature of this ruffian, "Curtius," I find to be that of the very Jackson who brought the charge against Foote.

and sacrificed those he disliked. Then various critics sometimes enlivened their occupation by bitter conflicts among themselves. Garrick had Bate on his side, but could never be sure of Woodfall (he himself was part proprietor of the *St. James's Chronicle*), and Este became one of Kemble's partisans, and later married him to Mrs. Brereton. But these powers, waiting to be conciliated or made hostile, were not likely to serve a débutant.

On the 30th September, 1783, John Philip Kemble made his first appearance in London, in *Hamlet*. The cast of the piece was not very striking: Bensley, Packer, Baddeley, Mrs. Hopkins, whose daughter Kemble was to marry later, and Miss Field. From the beginning to the end he was perfectly successful. His singularly handsome figure and grace, his elegant dress, his extraordinary likeness to his sister, reaching even to the voice; "which a person with eyes shut would mistake for hers;" and his perfect self-possession and deliberation, were what struck every critic. Then his general reading of the part was new and original, different from Garrick's or any other player's. He threw a softness and tenderness over the character. There was noticed also an extraordinary elaboration, evidently the result of the most intellectual and

careful study of the play, the greatest nicety in elocution, new emphasis, and the most judicious elocution. Woodfall owned that his relationship to his sister was proved by ability as well as by blood; but he found grave faults with the new actor, and for a long time the papers were filled with minute criticism. Like his sister, it was said he had learned every variety of modulation, but there was a formality, and air of the study. Like her, he appeared to have studied every stage nicety that was likely to attract the audience's attention or applause. "We never saw a veteran," said the *Herald*, "make more use of stage tricks than this young performer." They did not condemn this, but would have wished a little more attention to nature. Woodfall complained that he introduced too many new readings, almost laboriously. It was curious that the same imperfection should have been noticed in his voice that had imperilled the success of his sister on her first appearance; but this was set down to his being accustomed to the smaller Dublin house. Still in its softer inflection it showed uncommon feeling. In the fencing scene he exhibited too many bows and courtesies. Why, it was asked, was the lesson to the players omitted, unless, it was suggested, it was feared it would be

considered a pointed attack on too many players of the day. The real explanation was a species of modesty, very much out of place. There were some indications too of that odd grotesque pronunciation, with which the town was later to make merry. He spoke of the "lee—tle pipe" and "strucken deer," but it was noted that on his second performance many blemishes that had been found fault with were amended. The lesson to the players was reintroduced, the bows were abated, his laying his head on Ophelia's lap was omitted. Fault was also found with a coxcombical leer which he put on at sarcastic moments. In the famous soliloquy "To be, or not to be," a depth of thought, an air of rumination was wanting, and his style of walking was more like that of a minuet dancer.

John Taylor was present with Philips, the father of the beautiful Mrs. Crouch, and was struck with the laboriously critical tone of the character. But the same spectator owned that he never saw such a gradual improvement as study and repetition brought to the representation; an improvement owing in no slight degree to the laborious exercise of having written out the part no less than forty times. There was something in the *character* of this success, something so

founded on care, study, and self-confidence, that he at once assumed a position that was never to be disturbed. Even the critics seemed to show a reserve in dealing with him, for he had a calm and quiet superiority which awed them. Yet it is impossible not to see that this success was of a very different character from that of his sister. She swept after her all hearts, passions, sympathies; he had gained admiration and intellectual interest; but as the interests differed, so did the plays, and the advantage was with her. Still, with this intellectuality running through his acting, there was a softness and sensibility akin to his sister's; but this henceforth, from the peculiar training that he adopted, was to be gradually overlaid and stifled, save in a few of his grandest parts.

During the season he followed up his Hamlet, which he played twelve times, with Edward the Black Prince, Richard III., Sir Giles Overreach, Beverley, King John, Shylock, and some small characters.

In the *Gamester* brother and sister first combined their powers; but here he was unlucky. Hers was the centre figure. "He," as the critics said, "rendered the husband extremely important and interesting." But still his "tones" were very odd. Somehow it

would seem that such near relationship as brother and sister, husband and wife, causes a loss of illusion; where a husband and wife, for instance, are playing "distracted lovers" their real connexion will intrude, and refute the distraction of the situation.

With her also he appeared in *King John.* The King and Queen had expressed a wish to see the gifted sister and clever brother in that play; and this patronage by the Court becomes quite a feature in Mrs. Siddons' career. Though our theatres are abundantly visited by members of the Royal Family, this sort of countenance is very different from the healthy and public approbation of a visit in state. Such encouragement, directed in a marked manner to the finest plays in the language, gave evidence not only of interest but of taste, insured respect, and gave dignity to the theatre itself. Now any vulgarity called "burlesque" receives this cheap compliment.

To most of these characters the critics made the one objection — he was a little too solemn, and perhaps cold. He was diligently compared with Henderson, who was playing at Covent Garden with Miss Younge; and at this stage of Kemble's life there were characters in which Henderson might have the advantage. But there was a more daring

challenge given from that house; and at last the friends of the veteran Barry-Crawford persuaded her to try and dispute the verdict of the town. The trial was looked forward to with enjoyment by both friends and enemies. Hostile papers announced gleefully that Mrs. Crawford was shortly to "attack" Mrs. Siddons, and that the latter had "declared to stand the conflict." "It was ridiculous to suppose that Mrs. Crawford was afraid to attempt Isabella." On the 13th of November she appeared in her great part of Lady Randolph. There was something piteous in this last rally; for, after all, she had been one of the great corps of actresses, and though now in her decay was encouraged by the partiality of the Irish, and by the hostility of newspaper scribes to her rival. The house was crowded; the play was mounted in ragged fashion, the dresses not Scotch. They were scarcely prepared, however, for such a spectacle of age: her voice had become harsh and discordant; still she had her old stately and commanding air, and she produced abundant tears. The hostile papers were delighted; and one of them, with a strange malignity, stated that a few nights before, with all the attractions of a royal command night, the great Mrs. Siddons had drawn only a poor house, whereas there was not a seat

vacant at Mrs. Crawford's performance. This calumny was contradicted; the fact being that Drury Lane was crowded. But the great actress was coolly calculating her stroke; with a cold deliberation she selected the part which was considered her opponent's *cheval de bataille.* When the comparison had to be made, there were critics like Woodfall who admitted there were passages, of sudden and energetic passion, in which the new actress was inferior. It was also soon found that each represented quite a different school of interpretation, the "level" portions of the play being hurried over, or given in neutral tones, by Mrs Crawford, who reserved herself for sudden bursts, as the occasion demanded; whereas Mrs. Siddons adopted the favourite Kemble principle, of elaborating the utmost effect, whether of elocution or feeling, out of almost every line. It might be fairly urged that the former is the more dramatic principle of the two; for in real life character does not impress itself on every speech and incident, and on the stage such alternations produce a powerful effect. It is quite intelligible too, how this laborious elaboration brought to excess, as it was by the Kemble family, at last produced that stilted solemnity which later became associated with their acting. The spirit of partisan-

ship was carried so far that there was actually found a critic to write, that "Mrs. Siddons' head danced upon wires like Judy in the puppet-show, or one of the nodding China mandarins."* But the contest, if contest it were, came to a humiliating close. The old actress chose for her benefit the *Isabella* in which Mrs. Siddons had made such an impression; but when the night came the boxes were not taken, and the poor actress fell sick from mortification. However, she rallied once more. Just before she died, five years later, she was entering into a confederacy with Mrs. Yates to begin a combined campaign against the reigning favourite.

The latter proceeded on her triumphant career, and by coming forward in *Measure for Measure* early showed that gravitation to Shakspeare which in great actors is nearly irresistible. But after the tremendous pictures of passion and sensibility she had been giving, the character of Isabella must have disappointed her admirers. Far more satisfactory was her

* Mr. Campbell was surprised that Boaden should have thought that Mrs. Siddons looked to this contest with some nervous apprehensions. But there was surely something to dread, when the efforts of the unscrupulous party were exalting Mrs. Crawford to disparage her.

second Shakspearian attempt, Constance, in *King John,* which introduced her to the noble and classical line of characters in which, as in Lady Macbeth and Queen Katherine, her figure is best known to posterity. Her Constance was received with some coldness, Woodfall praising the passages where scorn and anger were conspicuous, but putting her below Mrs. Crawford where maternal grief and affection had to be displayed. But it is evident that time and study developed the character in her hands.

Her brother seemed to advance on his slow and steady course, making every step sure. He certainly received no extravagant encouragement from the town or the critics. Like his sister, he was waiting for some grand Shakspearian part to bring out his powers. The critics were coldly respectful, particularly Woodfall. He bore this indifference for some time; but one morning the public was amazed to see in the *Chronicle* an intemperate and offensive letter of his, and which, on Woodfall's part, was wholly unmerited. In this angry expostulation, he said he knew how to distinguish "what you dignify with the name of criticism," from what really deserved the name. "Some of your remarks," he said, "where gathered I don't now inquire, are good and liberal; *some are*

nonsensical and studiously abusive." He thought it proper to write this letter "under the exact notion of a gentleman's despising the slander of a bully, yet thinking it necessary to cane him for his impudence." This indiscreet protest was received with dignity, the editor merely announcing that he would not be deterred by threats from doing his duty. But for a long time to come the *Chronicle* passed over in silence his most important performances. This was one of the few false steps Kemble made in his life, and no doubt he heartily repented it.

CHAPTER XII.

SOCIAL HOMAGE.

ALL this time Mrs. Siddons' progress in the estimation of friends and acquaintances was no less remarkable. Every one was eager to know her, public curiosity was unabated, and as she passed from the stage-door, crowds always assembled to look at her, and their comical remarks diverted her. In the higher classes this eagerness passed the bounds of decency; and a Scotch lady of high rank, with a party of friends, who were mere strangers, actually forced her way into the drawing-room, scarcely taking the trouble to excuse herself. Mrs. Siddons gives a very amusing account of an exhibition that was made of her at Miss Monkton's (later the eccentric Lady Cork), the same whom Johnson called "a goose," and one of the blue-stocking sisterhood. The actress had determined to decline all invitations to parties, routs, &c., as she really wished to give herself up to study, and to the duties of her family. Miss Monkton

insisted on her coming to her house on a Sunday evening, assuring her that there would only be some half a dozen friends to meet her. She had been forewarned that this lady pursued any "notorious" person; but was assured by Miss Monkton that she need have no fears of meeting a crowd. "The appointed Sunday evening came. I went to her very nearly in undress, at the early hour of eight, on account of my little boy, whom she desired me to bring with me, more for effect, I suspect, than for his *beaux yeux*. I found with her, as I had been taught to expect, three or four ladies of my acquaintance; and the time passed in agreeable conversation, till I had remained much longer than I had apprehended. I was of course preparing speedily to return home, when incessantly repeated thunderings at the door, and the sudden influx of such a throng of people as I had never before seen collected in any private house, counteracted every attempt that I could make for escape. I was therefore obliged, in a state of indescribable mortification, to sit quietly down, till I know not what hour in the morning; but for hours before my departure, the room I sat in was so painfully crowded, that the people absolutely stood on the chairs, round the walls, that they might look over their neighbours' heads to

stare at me; and if it had not been for the benevolent politeness of Mr. Erskine, who had been acquainted with my arrangement, I know not what weakness I might have been surprised into, especially being tormented, as I was, by the ridiculous interrogations of some learned ladies, who were called *blues*, the meaning of which title I did not at that time appreciate, much less did I comprehend the meaning of the greater part of their learned talk. These profound ladies, however, furnished much amusement to the town for many weeks after, nay, I believe I might say, for the whole winter. Glad enough was I at length to find myself at peace in my own bedchamber." It will be noticed there is a quiet vein of comedy running through her letters and sketches, which would incline one to think that her powers of acting in this walk have not been sufficiently valued; but the thick folds of tragedy weighed heavier every year upon her limbs.*

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* Cumberland, in his periodical, *The Observer*, gives a picture of this scene. Disguising the characters under the fantastic names then the mode, it supplements the lady's description, but is not so vivacious. "I now joined a cluster of people, who had crowded round an actress, who sat upon a sofa, leaning on her elbow in a pensive attitude, and seemed to be counting the sticks of her fan, whilst they were vieing with each other in the most extravagant encomiums.

More agreeable were her associations with the friendship of men like Reynolds and Johnson. At the great portrait painter's house she was often to be found, his dinner-table being filled with guests like Burke and Windham, and all the rank, talent, and fashion of the age. It was then that he conceived the idea of that fine picture of the actress as "The Tragic Muse," which only a season ago excited universal admiration at the Winter Exhibition of the Royal Academy. To stand before this noble work—

'You was adorable last night in Belvidera,' says a pert young parson with a high toupée. 'I sat in Lady Blubber's box; and I can assure you she, and her daughters too, wept most bitterly. But then that charming mad scene—but, by my soul, it was a *chef d'œuvre!* Pray, madam, give me leave to ask you, was you really in your senses?' 'I strove to do it as well as I could,' answered the actress. 'Do you intend to play comedy next season?' says a lady, stepping up to her with great eagerness. 'I shall do as the manager bids me,' she replied. 'I should be curious to know,' says an elderly lady, 'which part, madam, you yourself esteem the best you play?' 'I shall always endeavour to make that which I am about the best.' An elegant and enchanting young woman of fashion now took her turn of interrogating, and with many apologies begged to be informed by her if she studied those enchanting looks and attitudes before a glass. 'I never study anything but my author.' 'Then you practise them at rehearsals,' rejoined the questioner. 'I seldom rehearse at all!' 'She has fine eyes,' says a tragic poet to an eminent painter. . . . Vanessa now came up, and desiring leave to introduce a young muse to Melpomene, presented a girl in a white frock, with a fillet of flowers

before its inspiration, grandeur, and dignity—makes us feel irresistibly that it is almost the finest and most satisfactory homage that has *ever* been paid to the stage. As he gazes, the spectator feels a sort of reverence, not only for the gifted woman it represents, but for the profession she followed. The artist, Northcote says, threw his whole soul into the work, and never took so much pains. Its rich brown tones are laid in the same key as those of Rembrandt, but its chief charm has been characterized by Mr. Tom Taylor with great felicity, who describes it, justly,

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tied round her hair, which hung down her back in flowing curls. The young muse made a low obeisance, and with the most unembarrassed voice and countenance, whilst the poor actress was covered with blushes, and suffering torture from the eyes of all in the room, broke forth as follows:—

> 'O thou, whom Nature's goodness calls her own,
> Pride of the stage and favourite of the town!'"

Mrs. Siddons says this was an accurate description of what occurred. Yet though she had abundant provocation, these rather brusque replies were not likely to make her popular, and in some degree account for that prejudice that was presently to follow her. There is yet a third account given by Miss Burney, where it is amusing to find that Erskine, who seemed to the actress to be her deliverer, was the chief offender, being the person that "talked across her" of her own merits. The truth is, Mrs. Siddons was rather "touchy" and impulsive, and always too vehement in fancying offence was meant.

as "the finest example of truly idealized portraiture, in which we have at once an epitome of the sitter's distinction, calling, or achievement, and the loftiest expression of which the real form and features are capable." In short, it is earthly in the likeness, and yet spiritualized by the touch of poetry. The general *pose* was suggested by a work of Michael Angelo. Mrs. Siddons gave what seemed to be two different accounts of the origin of the attitude. When the painter invited her to seat herself on her "undisputed throne," he was so pleased, she said, with the position that he would not let her alter it. On another occasion she told Mrs. Philips that after she had been arranged in position, when Sir Joshua was mixing his colours, that she turned to look at a picture in the room, and this change had been seized by the painter. Both amount to the same thing, in giving her the credit of the suggestion.* Between this work and one of the finest of

* She, it would seem, with some bad taste, told Sir Martin Shee and Miss Fanshawe, that "he wanted to trick her out in all the colours of the rainbow" as the Tragic Muse, and that but for her interference he would have done so. Finally, at the last sitting, Sir Joshua wished to add some colour to the face, and she again interposed. This seems claiming rather too much credit in the work, but it is characteristic of the practical mind of the actress.

Titian's which faced it, De la Roche could not decide. Barry said it was the finest idealization in the world; and Lawrence, that it was the finest female portrait ever painted. With a delicacy which she might have reciprocated, he completed his noble work by inscribing his name on the hem of her garment.

The painter was an enthusiastic admirer of her performances, and was highly gratified at her style of dress; a short waist instead of the long stiff stays, her hair generally laid close in little curls and braids, so as to display the shape of the head. At the theatre he always sat in the orchestra, in a line of famous men, Burke, Gibbon, Sheridan, Windham, and Fox, down whose dark cheeks the tears were often seen trickling. These eminent men would all find their way to her dressing-room, to pay their respects. Even the doubtful compliment of His Royal Highness the Prince of Wales's approbation was often offered to her. The same precious testimonial had been very recently bestowed on an actress at the same house—the luckless *Perdita* Robinson; but to the Muse of Tragedy he dared not make such profane advances. Indeed, she was always her own guard, and as was said of her later, one would as soon think of making love to the Archbishop of Canterbury.

A more grateful shape of homage was the gentlemen of Brookes's Club making up a handsome present, which was brought to her by Lord Carlisle, who reported that she was not at all *manièrée* in the reception of it. This seemed to surprise Mr. Walpole; but affectation is the last thing one would have thought of laying to her charge.

A place was waiting a connoisseur greater than any of these, and there was always a chair ready at the wing for Doctor Johnson, should his health permit him to come. This was only a year before he died, and the fine brave old man sent Mr. Windham to the actress to beg that she would do him the honour of taking tea with him at Bolt Court. Such compliments are always welcome to the true artist. She, with her brother and Windham, repaired up the narrow stairs to the Doctor's room, and there being no chair at hand for her to sit down—his books, we may suppose, covering the floor and chairs—his tact furnished him with a compliment that seems almost elegant, and which held more truth than the average compliment. "Madam," he said, with a smile, "you, who so often occasion a want of seats to other people, will the more easily excuse the want of one yourself." The actress, however, forgot this speech, though it

remained in the recollection of her brother, who perhaps repeated it to Mr. Boswell. Then, seating himself beside her, the gates of his old theatrical recollections were unlocked; those days when he had been a playgoer and critic, and had seen his friend "Davy" act, and Mrs. Clive, and Mrs. Porter, and Mrs. Pritchard. He dwelt specially on Garrick's merits, in both tragedy and comedy, turned then to the subject of Shakspeare's plays, and as she spoke of acting Queen Katherine, his favourite part, he expressed his wish to attend and see her. "But," said he, "I am too deaf and too blind, and could see or hear no farther off than the stage-box, and I have little taste for making an exhibition of myself in such a conspicuous situation." On this she proposed the chair at the wing, when the Doctor was much flattered, though the opportunity was never to come. He was greatly pleased with her, and wrote to his friend Mrs. Thrale, a little after what Goldsmith would have called his "bow-wow" manner, that "she had behaved with great modesty and propriety, and left nothing behind her to be censured or despised." He was also pleased to notice that she had not been depraved by either money or praise; and looked forward to seeing her again. Mrs. Siddons often

returned, when he always treated her with a scrupulous and old-fashioned courtesy and ceremoniousness, and on every occasion repeated the same formality, conducting her to the head of the stairs, holding her hand respectfully, and saying, with a bow, "Dear madam, I am your most humble servant." Though it used to be the fashion to speak of this man as uncouth, boorish, and bearish, there was more true gallantry in him than in a score of Chesterfields.

She dwells with even more pleasure on the intelligent patronage of the Royal Family, which was steady and genuine, and significant of a cultivated interest. This encouragement was of the most liberal and intellectual kind. The King was delighted with her graceful action, but far more with her repose in particular situations—a very intelligent criticism. It was, he said, the fault of Garrick, that he never would keep still. "He was a great fidget." At her performances he was often seen weeping, and the Queen told her, in broken English, that the only resource was to turn away from the stage; the acting was indeed "too disagreeable." She very soon was complimented by being commanded to read at the Palace; and in her agreeable, natural way, which makes us regret that she did not write her own life,

she tells us all her impressions of the scene. How awkward she felt in the costume which was *de rigueur* —the "sack," with hoop and treble ruffles—and how, on her arrival, she was led into an ante-chamber, where there were ladies of rank whom she knew, while presently the King appeared, drawing one of his little daughters in a "go-cart." This little Princess was about three years old, and when the actress said to one of the ladies that she longed to kiss her, the child held out its hand to be kissed. "So early," says Mrs. Siddons, "had she learnt this lesson of royalty." During the course of the reading the Queen noticed she was fatigued, and begged she would take some refreshment in the next room—a condescension which rather affected Mrs. Siddons, but it was no more than could be expected from that good Queen.*

The actress declined, and naïvely tells us the reason: she was in terror of slipping on the polished floor, as she had to walk backwards. Her Majesty

* Boaden was one of the old-fashioned loyalists, whose veneration for King, Church, and State, is almost ludicrously illustrated in the passages where he seems to apologize for the King visiting Drury Lane. "Even the *offensive politics* of the manager vanished before the charms of the new sovereign of the stage." Mr. Campbell copies this curious passage, and gives it as his own.

privately expressed much astonishment at seeing her so collected, and was pleased to say that the actress had conducted herself as though she had been used to a court. But Mrs. Siddons was at least collected on every occasion. "At any rate, I had frequently personated queens," is her pleasant comment.

Her worldly prospects were now very favourable. She had moved from the Strand to Gower Street. She set up her carriage; yet all that she received from the theatre, which she crowded to the roof, was something over twenty pounds a week. This seemed a miserable fixed salary; but she had besides two clear benefits, one of which Mr. Boaden says produced her 800*l.*, and another 650*l.*, while she only played three nights in the week. On a rough calculation this might bring her earnings at Drury Lane to about 2000*l.*, for the season of about seven months. During the rest of the year she was able to make as much again, and possibly more, by her performances in the country. And here it was impossible, without regret, to see her devoting time that should have been allowed for restoring her health and resting after her labours, to scouring all the provinces, to seeking eagerly for engagements at country theatres. This system she pursued for years.

It is enough to say that before her day it had not been adopted by any artist of her rank. The sagacious Garrick had always husbanded himself. She used to complain bitterly of the exhaustion consequent on these excursions; and she was always putting forward her children as excuses, much as she had done when on the Bath boards; so that it actually became a jest with the newspapers "as to those three children and a husband" which Mrs. Siddons was obliged to support. Yet the truth was, there was no occasion for this laborious gathering in of money; her income for London alone was abundant, and certain to continue so; but she could not complain if the members of her own profession looked with disfavour on this wholesale sweeping of their meagre pastures. It was ruinous to the steady business of the country stage. The star system was wisely discouraged by the country managers. At the Bath Theatre, for instance, no "star" was allowed, as an experienced manager phrased it, "to take all the cream for a short period, and leave the skimmings for the manager and performers to live upon." There a star would be engaged only on the terms of remaining for the whole season. The attraction became thus distributed over a great number

of nights; whereas, if a star like Mrs. Siddons came down, she gathered in for a few nights large sums, and after her departure caused a wholesale desertion of the house, from which the theatre took long to recover. Some managers for a time attempt to decline these dangerous auxiliaries, nearly as fatal to their ranks as their elephants were to the Carthaginians.* But the pressure of the surrounding gentry, and the temptation of a little ready money, was irresistible. To this, and to the example of Mrs. Siddons, we owe the perpetuation of the fatal star system, by reason of which British audiences have been trained, not to go and see a great play set off by a great actor or actress, but the actor or actress alone, for whom some little exercise in the way of a piece is written to show off their gifts. Thus it is that every leading player looks to his annual promenade through the country, and counts the gains which it may bring him at four or five times that of his London engagement.

This laborious earning of money was likely, as remarked before, to make her unpopular in the profession.

* When Mrs. Crawford came to Bath and offered her services for a few nights, the manager steadily refused them, and she remained the whole season there without an engagement.

It was given out that she would rarely condescend even to look on at the performance of other actors, and that she was never seen to applaud them, though this charge was perfectly false. Still it almost seems as if she had not much sympathy with them. She walked in a higher sphere. She mixed with the great and the aristocracy: they came to her house, and she was seen at theirs. She was said to prefer diligent private study to assiduous rehearsal; and indeed the nature of her characters—she being the central figure—made the public indifferent to what the other players did. Even the comic actors of her theatre suffered, though they could not hold her responsible; for as soon as the tragedy was finished, neither Quick nor Parsons, nor any of the humorists could detain the audience, who hurried away, as if in contempt of the fooleries that could follow such scenes of tragedy.

Another reason, which no doubt contributed to her unpopularity, was the strong "family" connexion installed at Drury Lane. Two of her sisters had now engagements there — beautiful girls, but devoid of much talent. What increased this feeling was the discreditable attempts of friends and partisans either to "write them up" above their companions,

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Melpomene.

or, with a pretension that seemed ludicrous, set them up in rivalry to their great sister. We shall see how the rough and intolerant Steevens was as partial to one as he was hostile to her sister, and how the warmth of his admiration betrayed him into some questionable proceedings.*

There were therefore many ominous murmurs heard as she concluded her season. No doubt she was indifferent; but the famous actress, when she returned and presented herself to the Drury Lane audience again, was to receive a rough lesson, which must have come on her like a shock.

While she started on her provincial tour Kemble made an engagement with his old friend Younger, of the Liverpool Theatre. By this agreement, a copy of which I have seen, he was to perform in all "plays, farces, operas, and pantomimes," and all for the modest

* A caricature published about this time might have furnished her with a useful warning. It was a likeness of "Melpomene," and represents the actress as grasping at a well-filled purse of money. A ridiculous story, too, appeared in the papers, in proof of her "nearness," that at St. Martin's Church, when there was a collection for the Westminster Dispensary, "she was seen lingering behind," with a view to avoid the plate. How absurd this libel was could be shown from the very shape it took; as it was remarked, that if she had wished to avoid the collection she would have been seen hurrying out among the first.

sum of ten shillings a night and a benefit, which was to be subject to thirty-five pounds' deduction, the charges of the house. It was evident that in these country expeditions the star actor relied upon his benefit night to recoup him his trouble and expense; and it was believed that this system made the expense fall lightly on manager and actor. But just as the "star" himself, while prizing good receipts for a few nights, was impoverished for the rest of the season, so the benefit night must have drained away much of the profit of the ordinary nights.

CHAPTER XIII.

EDINBURGH.

WHEN Mrs. Siddons was playing in Dublin for the first time, she was waited on by Jackson, the manager of the Edinburgh Theatre, who had travelled over specially to try and arrange an engagement. The history of this negotiation seems to account for the unpopularity which for a long time was to pursue the great actress in her own profession. It would seem that there was here, as on other occasions, an apparent grasping at profits, a spirit of "dealing" certain to raise a prejudice. She also contributed not a little to send this impression abroad, by appealing to the obligations she was under of working, and the necessity of a life of hard labour, thus needlessly forcing the "money" element into prominence. In the vocation of such an artist this should have been kept in the background; yet it was unfortunate that through her whole life these earthy bargainings —the sum she was to receive for a certain number

of nights; her stipulation as to "the charges of the house"—should be thrust forward in some connexion with her talents.

Jackson—who was later to add one to the many victims of theatrical mobs—was encouraged in his offers by a purse of two hundred pounds which some noblemen and gentlemen of Scotland had liberally made up to assist him in forming the engagement. The terms demanded were four hundred pounds for nine nights' performance, with a "clear benefit." The manager at once agreed to these demands, which were moderate enough, and returned home to make his arrangements. But in a short time news reached the Siddons' of the two hundred pounds' subscription, and Mr. Siddons then wrote to know if *that* sum went to make up the four hundred pounds agreed on. It was of course answered that this was entirely in aid of the manager. On this reply, an announcement was sent that Mrs. Siddons had changed her mind, that she did not choose any stipulated sum, but would take half the clear receipts, whatever they might be. The manager was in their power, and was obliged to agree. This seemed very shifty; for it was plain that the handsome subscription had let the Siddons' into the secret that overflowing houses were to be

looked for, and that they would lose by their original bargain. A few years later, John Kemble treated the manager of the York Theatre after precisely a similar fashion. But the strangest part of the whole was, that Mrs. Siddons contrived to have the two hundred pounds' subscription paid over to her without the knowledge of the manager!

Though Edinburgh has always offered a hearty and appreciative reception to artists of genius, the course of the Scottish drama is little beyond a blank. There are, indeed, incidents like those attending the production of *Douglas*, or like the patronage of the theatre by Sir Walter Scott and his friends; but its stage has no history. More remarkable still is it that a country so rich in poets and painters of human character, should have failed to contribute to the English stage a single player or dramatist that can be ranked above mediocrity. In this it contrasts strangely with Ireland, to whom the English stage is indebted for nearly every one of its most famous actors and actresses, and for some of its leading dramatists.

She made her first appearance at Edinburgh on Saturday, May 22, 1784, in *Belvidera*. The friends of the actress might have reason to anticipate a hostile, or at least indifferent reception from the class who would

form the substantial portion of the audience—viz., the pit and galleries. Fanatical Presbyteries had within a few years denounced the drama as, what they called in their uncouth diction, "louping against the Lord." There were many alive who could recal the illiberal persecution of the author of *Douglas;* and a Glasgow mob, not forty years before, had burnt a playhouse to the ground. Her first reception might well cause her misgivings. She describes the scene herself: "I must own I was surprised, and not a little mortified, at that profound silence, which was a contrast to the burst of applause I had been accustomed to hear in London. No, not a hand moved till the end of the scene; but then I was most amply remunerated." She does not set down the well-known story of the voice which at last gave the signal for applause; but she told it to Mr. Campbell. She felt as if she had been speaking to stones. At last she gathered herself up for one passage, and threw all her powers into it, then paused, and looked steadily at the audience, when the voice was heard, "That's no bad!" This produced roars of laughter, and the wished-for bursts of applause. This is a racy story; but it seems to betray a curious dulness or insensibility, for the inference seems to be, that but for the

fortunate comment, the approbation might have been reserved altogether. She owns, however, that she did not relish this economy of approbation, and wished for the English fashion of noisy encouragement, not so much for its cheering effect, as for the prosaic reason, "in order to give one breath and voice to carry one through some violent exertion."*

By the higher classes she was overwhelmed with civilities. "How shall I express my gratitude," she says, "for the honour and kindness of my northern friends?—for, should I attempt it, I should be thought the very queen of egotists. But never can I forget the private no less than public marks of their gratifying suffrages. There I became acquainted with the venerable author of *Douglas*, with Dr. Blair, David Hume, Dr. Beattie, Mr. Mackenzie, &c., and passed with them a succession of fleeting days, which never failed to instruct and delight me." She produced the unfailing effect—that test which was peculiar to her—of causing many ladies to faint away, or to fall into hysterics. Mrs. Beverley, Zara, and Lady Ran-

* "Had this coldness continued a moment longer," she told Mr. Campbell, "she was determined never to return to the country again!" She resented a little too quickly any public want of appreciation.

dolph followed. The author of *Douglas* was in the boxes; and it was felt that the tears flowing from innumerable eyes was a gratifying homage to him, as well as to the actress. She was compared with Mrs. Crawford in the same part; and it was confessed that the latter, though as grand and dignified, wanted the tenderness of the new actress. Then came Isabella, which seems to have been always the most effective and powerful of her characters, and which here produced an almost terrific impression, throwing gentlemen as well as ladies into fits. "Her looks," it was said, "seemed distraction, and her screams horror." It was felt to be almost too awful an exhibition, "and well nigh made a tragedy in the boxes." Confidence and repetition had no doubt added new force to her playing of the character, and the smallness of the theatre made every touch conspicuous. After such a triumph, the *Grecian Daughter* did not touch, but extorted applause rather than sympathy. On June 11, she played for the workhouse: and, in all, acted for eleven nights, one of which was for charity. But the furore she excited was a phenomenon in itself. Crowds began to assemble at the theatre doors so early as two o'clock; and on a single day the application for seats at the box-office amounted to two thou-

sand five hundred and fifty-seven, while there was only accommodation for six hundred and thirty people. Crowds came from Glasgow. Those who had subscribed the purse assumed that the privilege of a choice of seats belonged to them, and contrived to fill the pit to the exclusion of the regular frequenters. This led almost to a riot, and a sort of compromise was arranged at a public meeting, by which a couple of rows, holding about sixty persons, were set apart for these claimants, at box prices.* It was remarked that with every repetition of a character she improved. Even her mute farewell was admired as "a most expressive silence;" while her face most eloquently spoke gratitude, respect, and affection. The subscribers, in addition to their purse of money, which they rather unhandsomely diverted from its original destination, presented her with an "elegant silver tea vase."†

* Some verses in the *Scots Magazine* give a picture of the scene: the pit being described as "all porter and pathos, all whisky and whining,"—while

> "From all sides of the house, hark! the cry how it swells,
> While the boxes are torn with most heart-piercing yells!"

† It bore the following odd inscription: "As a mark of *esteem* for superior genius and unrivalled talents, this vase is respectfully *inscribed* with the name of SIDDONS." Thus the "mark of esteem"

The "Siddons fever," which Mr. Campbell says the doctors attributed to the heat from overcrowding at her performances, was surely a plagiarism from the complimentary "Garrick fever," which had broken out in Dublin some forty years before. She left the place with regret, and attended by the regard of all, save perhaps that of her manager. The speculation did not "pay," through the very hard terms that were exacted from him.*

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seemed strictly limited to engraving the name on the piece of plate.

* He thus strikes the balance:

	£	*s.*	*d.*
Nine nights' receipts	467	7	7
Gentlemen's subscription	200	0	0
Clear benefit at raised prices, *about*	180	0	0
Presents by plate and gold tickets, roughly, at	120	0	0
	967	7	7
Less her travelling expenses	50	0	0
Clear profit	£917	7	7

The manager's side of the account ran—

	£	*s.*	*d.*
Half receipts	467	7	7
Less expenses of engagement	£50 0 0		
Charges of house on Infirmary benefit	35 0 0		
Ditto on Mrs. Siddons' benefit	35 0 0		
	120	0	0
	£347	7	7

The "charges of the houses" were put too low, and he says that

Concluding her engagement here she proceeded straight from Edinburgh, on the 15th June, to fulfil a new one in Dublin.

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actors like Pope, King, and Miss Farren, had always allowed something handsome on settlement. Nothing was to be obtained from Mrs. Siddons. This economy or carefulness was to bear inconvenient fruit. The average profit would have been about 25*l.* a night.

CHAPTER XIV.

TROUBLES AT DUBLIN.

ON her arrival one of her old Cheltenham patronesses appeared on the scene, Miss Boyle, now become Mrs. O'Neil, of Shane's Castle, in the north of Ireland. This "charming friend," as she called her, soon established her in comfort.

In this country she seems to have been overwhelmed with civility; every one, from the Duke of Rutland, the Lord Lieutenant, downwards, welcoming her as if she were some great lady of rank. "I was received," she says, "by all *the first families* with the most flattering hospitality, and the days I passed with them will be ever remembered among the most pleasurable of my life." During her later performances she was staying on a visit with the Duchess of Leinster, and came in to rehearsal from that lady's house. This aristocratic patronage was quite characteristic of the country. It was the *ton* of the Irish

Court to support everything theatrical; and thus had Mr. Foote been *fêted* when he came over.

But she carefully distinguished the class with whom she spent these pleasurable days; for from those lower in degree she was to experience a steady course of annoyance. Mr. Daly was a good-looking man, proud of his figure, and a tolerable actor. It is quite probable that his dislike to this actress arose from the failure of such gifts to make any impression on her. Indeed, she hints as much. Her account of the absurd beginning of his dislike is too graphic not to be given in her own words.

"The manager of the theatre also very soon began to adopt every means of vexation for me that he could possibly devise, merely because I chose to suggest, at rehearsal, that his proper situation, as Falconbridge, in *King John*, was at the right hand of the King. During the scene between Constance and Austria, he thought it necessary that he should, though he did it most ungraciously, adopt this arrangement; but his malevolence pursued me unremittingly from that moment. He absurdly fancied that he was of less consequence, when placed at so great a distance from the front of the stage, at the ends of which the kings were seated; but he had

little or nothing to say, and his being in the front would have greatly interrupted and diminished the effect of Constance's best scene. He made me suffer however sufficiently for my personality, by employing all the newspapers to abuse and annoy me the whole time I remained in Dublin, and to pursue me to England with malignant scandal; but of that anon. The theatre, meantime, was attended to his heart's content; indeed, the whole of this engagement was as profitable as my most sanguine hopes could have anticipated."

True to her unfortunate weakness of attributing every slight to deep-seated and malignant animosity, she imputes to the manager the storm of odium that was presently to assail her in London. Here again she was mistaken; he could not have had such influence, though many stories from the Irish papers found their way across the Channel, and were diligently circulated. But, as will be seen, the popular feeling against her grew out of many mixed prejudices, and came from the scattered ranks of her own profession. She had other annoyances: she must have been piqued at the preference shown to Mrs. Crawford; and it was given out that Miss Younge, who had been also "greatly followed," had

taken more money out of Dublin alone than she had out of all Ireland. This was an idle falsehood, but there was a malice in the circulation of such reports. A story was copied into the London papers, to the effect that she had been prevailed to go and look at Mr. Home's pictures, a local artist of some celebrity; and that when asked respectfully to sit to him, had declined, with a great many airs: she "could hardly find opportunity to give a sitting to Sir Joshua," &c. The piqued artist answered, that it was no object to him, or made some such indifferent reply; at which she was said to have gone away in a fury, after boxing his ears. The truth was she sat in Dublin, and was greatly pleased with the picture. No one of course seriously accepted this absurdity; but it is probable that she offended the artist by stating too bluntly her reasons against sitting.*

* Another of these stories ran that a Dublin merchant who was entertaining Mr. Kemble and Mr. Siddons, had expressed a great longing to be introduced to Mrs. Siddons. Her husband is reported to have replied that he would like to do so, but that he did not know how he was *to break the matter* to her. Under all this exaggeration it is easy to trace the slender modicum of truth on which it is based. She was obliged to make some barrier against the crowds who insisted on becoming acquainted with her; and the injudicious husband, wishing to be gracious, might have readily used some such phrase expressive of the great difficulties to be overcome.

In the middle of her engagement she fell ill of a violent fever, and was confined to her bed for a few nights. The manager and his friends chose to see, in this sickness, a pretence for avoiding her work, and forthwith "inspired" the newspapers with a number of those little "dirty" paragraphs of a free and personal description, which then filled up corners in all journals of both kingdoms. When she recovered she resumed her duties, but was much exhausted. She was pressed to play for this and that charity, and for benefits; unreasonable demands, based upon the supposition that she was "coining" money, as the phrase runs. When in the following year the extraordinary phenomenon was witnessed of a great actress put publicly on her trial for being too economical of her gains, it was stated by Woodfall (or by her brother, to whom it was believed Woodfall opened his columns), that she played in Dublin for many charities. This is incredible on the face of it, as her engagement was for no more than twenty-two nights. She wished to play for one or two charities; but here again she was unfortunate, for having promised on her first visit to play for the Marshalsea prisoners, she was too much pressed for time, and sent them a small subscription instead. The follow-

ing year she meant to fulfil her promise, but the unfortunate misunderstanding as to Digges, the actor, who had been seized with paralysis when rehearsing with her, interfered. This will be explained a little further on.

In September she went down to Cork for an engagement, where there was a fresh quarrel with the manager, which led to more paragraphs in the papers; and a malicious account came down from Dublin of her inhumanity in refusing to play for a poor paralyzed old actor. It was solemnly stated that "there was a general opinion abroad that the softer virtues of humanity did not reside in her breast," and it was written over to London, that "the attractions of our capital actress were now entirely at an end. She is deplorably neglected, which must be the result of a want of taste in the public or of merit in the actress." However, Mr. Daly's "activity" in the arts of puffing, we may presume, had saved him from loss. The very day after her engagement concluded the newspapers turned on her; the very journal in which her praises had been so persistently sung, bidding her remember how "her comb had been cut" by Mrs. Crawford. Another addressed her ironically, saying, "it was impossible she

could excite such exquisite feelings of distress without feeling some emotions of real humanity." Another paragraph boldly called upon any one of her profession to come forward and state if she had ever done a kind action. Another prophesied that she would be driven from the London stage if she ever ventured to show herself on it. This malignity seems incredible.

No wonder she was delighted to get away from these intrigues, and find herself a welcome guest at Shane's Castle, the seat of the O'Neils, whose hospitalities seem to have been sustained on a scale of princely splendour. The old castle, now a ruin, then stood on the edge of Lough Neagh, in the centre of a noble park. A distinguished party had been assembled to meet her, among the rest "poor Lord Edward Fitzgerald, the most amiable, honourable, though misguided youth I ever knew." "The luxury of this establishment," she says, "almost inspired the recollection of an Arabian night's entertainment. Six or eight carriages, with a numerous throng of lords and ladies on horseback, began the day by making excursions around this terrestrial paradise, returning home just in time to dress for dinner. The table was served with a profusion and elegance

to which I have never seen anything comparable. The sideboards were decorated with adequate magnificence, on which appeared several immense silver flagons containing claret. A fine band of musicians played during the whole of the repast; they were stationed in the corridors, which led to a fine conservatory, where we plucked our dessert, from numerous trees, of the most exquisite fruits. The foot of the conservatory was washed by the waves of a superb lake, from which the cool and pleasant wind came to murmur in concert with the harmony from the corridors. The graces of the presiding genius, the lovely mistress of the mansion, seemed to blend with the whole scene."

This picture seems a little theatrical, with the "adequate magnificence" of the sideboards, and the "flagons containing claret;" but it was scarcely an overdrawn description of the splendours of that old house. The glories of the "wonderful lake," where the fisherman strays, and under whose waters are made out the spectral "round towers of other days," had not yet been sung by Moore; but it still remains one of the noblest demesnes in the country.

Taking with her at least these agreeable recol-

lections, she now left Ireland, and most probably her brother left with her. He too had had his bickerings with Daly, chiefly in regard to increase of salary, which must have been raised, as otherwise he would not have remained so long in the country; but to the end he kept to the respectable course that he pursued all through his life. Before he went away the Catholic archbishop and clergy entertained him at a public dinner, an exceptional compliment for a player. Much improved in his playing, he at last departed to enter on his London engagement, confident of his success.

CHAPTER XV.

UNPOPULARITY.

IN the life of the great actor run two currents side by side—one of their public, the other of their private life. But it is almost impossible to keep them separate; from either the irresistible curiosity of the public, the vanity of the artist himself, or the malice of the ill-natured. It is always well, for the dignity of the player, that his private life should, as it were, be kept sacred, as indeed Hazlitt has shown in his pleasant paper, "Whether players should be seen in the boxes." It now became the great actress's hard fate to be dragged into an unpleasant publicity. Her success had been too splendid for her to escape the efforts of malignity, and an unmanly and undeserved attack on her was now to be organized for which she was not accountable, unless she is to be blamed for a constitutional coldness of character.

Conscious of her own surpassing gifts, of the weary

slavery she had passed through to bring them into notice, and thoroughly domestic in her tastes, she had acquired an indifference, if not a contempt, to the outside world, of which her bitter feeling towards Garrick and Drury Lane was a fair specimen. With a naturally warm and affectionate heart, almost impulsive in her relations with her friends, she had a cold reserve to those who were not her friends, and a carelessness which rather checked sympathy, and might be set down to want of tact. This is often found in such fine natures, and in those which have passed through a severe probation. Such feel they have earned their position dearly, and disclaim the ordinary little cheap arts by which favour is secured. Some such feeling it is certain was in her mind; and those skilled in character will see a slight but different indication of it in her resenting seriously on several occasions the little traps laid by well meaning but injudicious people to get her to meet company. All this in so great a genius was justifiable; but the crowd cannot understand: and it was such a want of tact that was now to raise a storm, which was for a time to embitter all her triumphs, and which, for the rest of her life, scarcely ever left her in peace.

In her own profession she had made enemies, and others also on the Press. Scribblers, in the *Morning Herald* especially, were never weary of defaming her: no doubt in the interest of her rivals. It was hard indeed for good actresses like Mrs. Crawford, Mrs. Yates, Miss Younge, or Mrs. Abington, to find themselves of a sudden reduced almost to obscurity. A little before the time when she was expected to return to town, some strange gossip began to appear, which hinted at meanness, stinginess, and even inhumanity. Reports from Ireland began to arrive, and it was at last openly stated that, with the large sums she was receiving, she had actually taken money to play for a good actor suddenly stricken with paralysis; that for another who was one of her own Drury Lane companions, she had declined to do the same service unless for a large sum. The first referred to the unfortunate Digges, whose history was a strange one; the other to Brereton, who had played with her so finely and with such power in *Venice Preserved.* These attacks were urged with a growing fierceness, and every newspaper was dotted over with paragraphs about this little scandal.

By the time she arrived the matter had grown so serious that it became necessary to contradict these

charges formally. And though the announcement of her coming performance, when given out at the theatre, was received with favour, her husband thought fit to address a letter of explanation to the papers—a most awkwardly worded production. In this he gave what he absurdly called the "solemn facts," denying that Mrs. Siddons ever asked or accepted a single farthing, and appealing to Digges's own acknowledgment of her kindness — "a very polite note," which had unfortunately been destroyed. So far from refusing to play for Brereton, she had agreed to do so for a much smaller sum than she was in the habit of receiving from the other actors. But, unhappily, she had fallen ill, and was compelled to keep her bed for nearly a fortnight, and when she recovered the manager's claims and her own ill health prevented her performing her promise. After that, "she made another attempt to serve him; why it failed Mr. Brereton could truly tell." Such an explanation was not considered satisfactory. It was undignified, and the exculpation that "*so far* from refusing to play for Mr. Brereton," she had taken twenty pounds from him for doing so, seemed rather a ludicrous shape of reasoning. The "other attempt to serve him," was a scarcely delicate reference to an offer she was said to have made

of giving him cash down instead of her services—a scarcely handsome reminder. Three or four days later Brereton was induced to write to the papers, confirming in a blunt style the truth of the story as regarded him. "He was forced," he said, "to own himself under many obligations of friendship" to her. Mr. Siddons commented on this "obliging" testimony, and not being able "to withhold his public thanks from Mr. Brereton," hoped that soon "the artful schemes of her detractors" would be confounded by the appearance of a letter from Mr. Digges. Two days later Mr. Brereton wrote again to strengthen his statement, which, he said, had been misunderstood. "In the course of a long and dangerous illness he had received proofs of friendship which he should ever remember with gratitude, and avowed now with sincere satisfaction." All this was painful, and such legal proof and awkward balancing of favours was utterly fatal to the dignity of the actress. On that very night she had to go down to the theatre and take the verdict of the public, to whose arbitration she had been so ill-advised as to submit what in nowise concerned them. It is curious how such a challenge has scarcely ever failed to rouse the injustice and meaner passions of an audience. There is something, we may suppose, very

tempting in their having a superior being on trial before them, and something equally flattering to the complacency of pit and galleries in having a chance of asserting their strength and superiority. It is only by some such theory that the indecent and unreasonable persecution which Garrick, Kemble, Mrs. Siddons, and Kean had suffered at their hands, can be explained.

It should be remembered, however, that a general rumour of avariciousness and of a disinclination to help her fellow-players had got abroad some time before, and these two instances seem to have been eagerly seized on as a fortunate piece of evidence. And though envy and jealousy in her own profession had industriously worked up their charges, such could not have been sufficient without public support to organize the terrible reception that was now to greet her. The play was the gloomy domestic tragedy of *The Gamester*, that lugubrious but interesting picture of home tragedy. This ought to have been a momentous night for the stage, and Kemble, with the consciousness of his own great powers, as strong as was that of his sister in hers, and resting on his long labours, might have fairly looked to making one of those brilliant successes which would next morning have

found his name in every one's mouth. Brother and sister, too, were to appear in the same powerful play; but the miserable entertainment of baiting one against whom they had a grievance was more seductive.

It is pleasant to think that the brave woman should have behaved with fortitude in the presence of the cabal, and with a resolution as sagacious as it was gallant. It must have been a terrible moment for her as she stood with her brother on the stage waiting for the curtain to go up. She was received with a burst of hooting and hissing, and stood there, as she says, "the object of public scorn;" but she never quailed for a moment. Her brother led her forward to the footlights; but this only increased the storm. Mr. Boaden, who was in the pit, noticed the perfect composure and dignity, with her grateful acknowledgment of the friendly applause with which it was in vain attempted to overpower the unmanly attack. Her own natural account shows how much she was suffering, and that this bearing was merely assumed. No wonder she looked back to "the horrors of this dreadful night."

"Amidst this afflicting clamour I made several attempts to be heard, when at length a gentleman

stood forth in the middle of the front of the pit, impelled by benevolent and gentlemanly feeling, who, as I advanced to make my last attempt at being heard, accosted me in these words: 'For Heaven's sake, madam, do not degrade yourself by an apology, for there is nothing necessary to be said.' I shall always look back with gratitude to this gallant man's solitary advocacy of my cause: like '*Abdiel, faithful found; among the faithless, faithful only he.*' His admonition was followed by reiterated clamour, when my dear brother appeared, and carried me away from this scene of insult. The instant I quitted it, I fainted in his arms; and, on my recovery, I was thankful that my persecutors had not had the gratification of beholding this weakness. After I was tolerably restored to myself, I was induced, by the persuasions of my husband, my brother, and Mr. Sheridan, to present myself again before that audience by whom I had been so savagely treated, and before whom, but in consideration of my children, I would have never appeared again. The play was the *Gamester*, which commences with a scene between Beverley and Charlotte. Great and pleasant was my astonishment to find myself, on the second rising of the curtain, received with a silence so profound that I was absolutely awestruck, and never yet

have I been able to account for this surprising contrast; for I really think that the falling of a pin might have been then heard upon the stage."

It was then that this fearless woman addressed them in a short speech that had been, no doubt, carefully prepared beforehand. "The kind and flattering partiality," she said, "which I have uniformly experienced in this place, would make the present interruption distressing to me indeed, were I conscious of having deserved your censure. *The stories which have been circulated against me are calumnies.* When they shall be proved to be true my aspersers will be justified; but till then my respect for the public leads me to be confident that I shall be protected from unmerited insult." This short and skilfully drawn appeal at once produced an effect. Here was no longer the clumsy touch of Mr. Siddons, and it seems probable that her brother, well skilled in the tactics of those unequal battles at the footlights, had furnished this artful protest. Even the last word was happily chosen, as it recalled to the unmannerly audience that they were assailing a defenceless woman.

The effect was magical. She withdrew, and the curtain fell, and the veteran King came out to entreat their indulgence for a few moments while the gallant

actress was recovering herself. She then appeared once more, and went through the part triumphantly. In her behaviour there is a something that excites our warmest sympathy, and we can accept that remarkable declaration of hers as perfectly sincere, that but for the thought of her young children she would never have presented herself there again. She might well congratulate herself on as spirited a battle and victory as woman ever won.*

The next day this scene was the talk of the town. Again the papers began to fill with charges and defences. In a few days arrived a letter from Digges' son, and later, one from the shattered, broken Digges himself, which had been both long delayed by the stormy weather between Holyhead and Dublin, admitting that she *had* played for his benefit and had *not* taken any money for her services. Woodfall, always cold but just towards her, urged her innocence—for it almost came to be a question of that—with great force

* Brereton actually played in the piece, and Boaden makes some severe remarks on his not coming forward there and then to offer testimony. But this would have only added to the confusion, and might have had worse effects, the audience not being in the humour for logic. Besides, he could have said nothing on the more serious charge. The grateful Lee Lewes was also present to give his testimony to her generosity to him, if called on.

and argument. Here, he said, were the charges. She had first refused to play for Mr. Digges, and had then demanded a sum of money if she were to do so: the answer was, that she had played for Mr. Digges, and had taken no money. She had refused altogether to play for Brereton: she had shown that she had consented to do so. The matter might now be allowed to rest.

CHAPTER XVI.

RESTORED TO FAVOUR.

AND yet, reviewing the whole matter, it must be admitted that there were grounds for that rather rough-and-ready judgment which a public is privileged to form. And further, she herself, in her own account of the transaction, has passed over all that seemed to justify these hasty impressions. Here is the true and important account of the transaction.

A natural question would be, *why* were both these actors, on whom she had conferred such favours, so dissatisfied? What was their real or fancied grievance? She had appealed to the Digges' family: yet here came the testimony of the son. He said that when his father was seized with this sudden illness, Mr. Daly, the manager, without the knowledge of Digges, spoke to Mr. Siddons as to giving his wife's services for a benefit. *Mr. Siddons refused* the request. Daly then offered to pay any reasonable sum they might name. This was also refused, and he adds,

that nothing further was done during his stay in Dublin, which lasted some days. His father, when he began to recover, was told of the matter, and had so little hope of her assistance that he began to organize a benefit by the assistance of Colonel French and some amateurs. Old Digges' testimony was to much the same effect. "When I lay almost insensible," he says, "through the effect of my paralytic stroke, Mr. Daly applied to Mrs. Siddons to play for me; but, for reasons *which perhaps were very forcible ones*, she refused. The rumour of this spread through the town, and severe animadversions and little addresses to her appeared in the papers. Mr. Siddons *then called, and offered his wife's assistance.* After the refusal Mr. Daly had met with, I own it was an unexpected event." He also added: "I did not pay Mrs. Siddons for my benefit." Thus it seems to be true that she had refused to play for him, and that, when this step seemed likely to bring unpopularity, she consented. Lee Lewes, who was in Dublin, and a warm admirer of hers, corroborates this view. He says that, on Digges' illness, "a person came to her and proposed that she should play for him; her answer was, that she was sorry she had but one night to spare, and for that she thought she was engaged in

honour to play for the Marshalsea, as she had intended in the year before. This to be sure was a denial, though not an uncharitable one. The messenger had not been long gone when it struck her that it would be more humane to assist this old unfortunate; and immediately she despatched a person to Drumcondra, where Digges was, to say that Mrs. Siddons had reconsidered the matter, and would be glad to perform for him. He was thankful, and the night for the play was fixed. There was a good house."

Here again is the refusal to play; but it is not unlikely that he was mistaken as to the speediness of her change of mind. But in her own account, written many years after, she says nothing of these refusals, and even claims the credit of proposing the idea. Here is her story: "When my visit to Shane's Castle was over I entered into another engagement in Dublin. Among the actors in that theatre was Mr. Digges, who had formerly held a high rank in the drama, but who was now, by age and infirmity, reduced to a subordinate and mortifying situation. It occurred to me that I might be of some use to him if I could persuade the manager to give him a night, and the actors to perform for him, at the close of my

engagement; but, when I proposed my request to the manager, he told me it could not be, because the whole company would be obliged to leave the Dublin Theatre, in order to open the theatre at Limerick; but that he would lend the house for my purpose, if I could procure a sufficient number of actors to perform a play. By indefatigable labour, and in spite of cruel annoyances, Mr. Siddons and myself got together, from all the little country theatres, as many as would enable us to attempt *Venice Preserved.* Oh! to be sure, it was a scene of disgust and confusion. I acted Belvidera, without having ever previously seen the face of one of the actors; for there was no time for even one rehearsal; but the motive procured us indulgence. Poor Mr. Digges was most materially benefited by this most ludicrous performance; and I put my disgust into my pocket, since money passed into his. Thus ended my Irish engagement; but not so my persecution by the manager, at whose instance the newspapers were filled with the most unjust and malignant reflections on me. All the time I was on a visit of some length to the Dowager Duchess of Leinster, unconscious of the gathering storm, whilst the public mind was imbibing poisonous prejudices against me. Alas

for those who subsist by the stability of public favour!"

It will be seen that here she says nothing of Digges' sudden paralytic stroke, and speaks of him as if he had been for some time degraded in the theatre to some insignificant rank, and merely tolerated as a pensioner. The truth was he was the leading actor, and was playing Pierre to her Belvidera. And this we can see was one of the blemishes in Mrs. Siddons; wherever, as at Drury Lane, she had been treated injuriously she seemed ever after to set it down to the most vindictive motives, or to a special animosity. This will be seen in many instances, and is not a little curious in so fine a character.

Her own statement, then, answers the question put at the beginning of this examination, why it was that Digges should have felt himself aggrieved. She had indeed acted for him, but it was after the season had closed, and when all the actors had gone away. The beggarly exhibition she so happily describes could not have produced nearly so much as a regular benefit under suitable conditions. The public having heard of the first refusal naturally considered the discreditable performance but a poor compliment to

the old and popular player, and asked why she had not played for him during the season. And this point too she passes over in her account—viz., why she could not have chosen a night before the season closed. Even the refusal to play, which she says nothing of, is almost consistent with her story, for she merely *omits* it.

Then as to Brereton: it was urged that a person who could play three nights a week after a violent fever could hardly plead an invalid's excuse. And considering that Brereton was the only leading actor of her own theatre who was with her, and that he played hero to her heroine, she might have paid him the compliment of acting for him without charge; and considering that she carried away the large sum of 2000*l.* from Dublin, a reduction of 10*l.* *to him* had a rather petty air. But most likely all this wretched muddle was the work of Mr. Siddons, who, considering all the charitable taxes laid on her, and the many benefits she had to assist, found himself obliged, like most husbands of money-getting actresses, to bargain and chaffer for her gifts as if they were wares, and get as much money as they could be made to bring in. Such seems to be the history of this unlucky transaction, which, it must be owned,

has not hitherto been treated with full impartiality.*

The public, it will be admitted, had some apparent grounds for being prejudiced, and a stupid and blundering discussion of what should not have been discussed, at once made them parties to an argument which had only the effect of placing the great actress in a most undignified position. For several nights afterwards this onslaught was recommenced as she entered; but the majority of the audience were able to put it down. She would make her curtsey, and then go on with her part; but it was noticed that she was unnerved and uncertain. Privately she owned to friends that for a long time afterwards she had lost all enthusiasm, and actually sickened at the very idea of continuing to be an actress. How she felt all this persecution will be seen in some very natural and affectionate letters that she wrote to the Whalleys about this time.

"My dearest Friends,—I hardly dare hope that you will remember me: I know I don't deserve that

* Campbell and Boaden have rested chiefly on Mrs. Siddons' own statement, dismissing every imputation whatsoever against her on the ground of her high character.

you should, but I know also that you are too steadfast and too good to cast me off for a seeming negligence, to which my heart and soul are averse, and the appearance of which I have incessantly regretted. What can I say in my defence? I have been very unhappy; now 'tis over I will venture to tell you so, that you may not 'lose the dues of rejoicing.' *Envy, malice, detraction, all the fiends of hell have compassed me round about to destroy me;* 'but blessed be God who hath given me the victory,' &c. I have been charged with almost everything bad, except incontinence; and it is attributed to me as thinking a woman may be guilty of every crime in the catalogue of crimes, provided she retain her chastity. God help them and forgive them; they know but little of me. *I daresay you will wonder that a favourite should stand her ground so long; and in truth so do I. I have been degraded; I am now again the favourite servant of the public, and I have kept the noiseless tenor of my temper in these extremes: my spirit has been grieved, but my victorious faith upholds me.* I look forward to a better world for happiness, and am placed in this in mercy, to be a candidate for that. But what makes the wound rankle deeper is, that ingratitude, hypocrisy, and perfidy have barbed the darts. But it is

over, and I am happy. Good God! what would I give to see you both, but for an hour! how many thousand thousand times do I wish myself with you, and long to unburthen my heart to you. I can't bear the idea of your being so long absent. I know you will expect to hear what I have been doing; and I wish I could do this to your satisfaction. Suffice it to say, that I have acted Lady Macbeth, Desdemona, and several other things this season, with the most unbounded approbation; and you have no idea how the innocence and playful simplicity of the latter have laid hold on the hearts of the people. I am very much flattered by this, as nobody ever has done anything with that character before. My brother is charming in Othello; indeed, I must do the public the justice to say that they have been extremely indulgent, if not partial, to every character I have performed.

"I have never seen Mr. Pratt since I heard from you, but he discovers his unworthiness to my own family; he abuses me, it seems, to one of my sisters in the most complete manner. How distressing is it to be so deceived! Our old Mary, too, whom you must remember, has proved a very viper. She has lately taken to drinking, has defrauded us of a great

deal of money given her to pay the tradespeople, and in her cups has abused Mr. Siddons and me beyond all bounds; and I believe in my soul that all the scandalous reports of Mr. Siddons' ill-treatment of me originated entirely in her. One must pay for one's experience, and the consciousness of acting rightly is a comfort that hell-born malice cannot rob us of. Lady Langham has done me the honour to call with her daughter: her drawings are very wonderful things for such a girl. In the compositions she has drawn me in *Macbeth* asleep and awake; but I think she has been unsuccessful in this effort. Next week I shall see your daughter and the rest. Sarah is an elegant creature, and Maria is as beautiful as a seraph. Harry grows very awkward, sensible, and well-disposed; and thank God we are all well. I can stay no longer than to hope that you are both so, and happy (see how disinterested I am!); that Reeves and the dear Paphy are so too; and that you will love me, and believe me, with the warmest and truest affection, unalterably and gratefully yours,

"S. Siddons.

"My whole family desire the kindest remembrances. We have bought a house in Gower Street,

Bedford Square; the back of it is most effectually in the country, and delightfully pleasant.

"God bless you, my dear Mrs. Whalley! How perfectly do I see you at this moment; and you, too, my dear friend, for it is impossible to separate your images in my mind. Pray write to me soon, and give me another instance of your unwearied kindness. Adieu!"

Another letter to the same friends is worth inserting here, it is so buoyant and affectionate:—

"Mrs. Wapshawe has been so good as to bestow half an hour upon me. She speaks of you as I should speak of you—as if she could not find words, and as if her sentiments could not enough honour you both. If you could look into the hearts of people, trust me, my beloved and ever-lamented friends, you would be convinced that mine yearns after you with increasing and unalterable affection. See there now—how have I expressed myself? That is always the way with me: when I speak or write to you, it is always so inadequately, that I don't do justice to myself; for I thank God that I have a soul capable of loving you, and trust I shall find an advocate in your bosoms to assist my inability and simpleness. You know me of old for a matter-of-fact woman. Mrs. Wapshawe has revived

my hopes; she tells me that you will return sooner than I hoped. Now I'll begin my cottage again: it has been lying in heaps a great while, and I have shed many tears over the ruins; but we will build it up again in joy. You know the spot that I have fixed upon, and I trust I have not forgotten the plan! Oh! what a reward for all that I have suffered, to retire to the blessings of your society; for, indeed, my dear friends, I have paid severely for my eminence, and have smarted with the undeserved pain that should attend the guilty only; but it is the fate of office, and the rough brake that virtue must go through; and sweet, 'sweet are the uses of adversity.' I kiss the rod. Mrs. Wapshawe was quite delighted with Mr. Beach's picture of you; but she tells me that you wear coloured clothes and lace ruffles; and I valued my picture more, if possible, for standing the test of such a change as these (to me unusual) ornaments must necessarily make in you. I think I shall long to strip you of these trappings. I am so attached to the garments I have been used to see you wear, and think they harmonize so well with your face and person, that I should wish them like their dear wearer, who is without change. I am proud of your chiding, though God knows how unwillingly I would give you

a moment's pain; nay, more, He knows that I neither go to bed, nor offer prayers for blessings at His hands, in which your welfare does not make an ardent petition. But why should I wound your friendly bosoms with the relation of my vexations? I knew you too well to suppose you could hear of my distresses without feeling them too poignantly. I resolved to write when I had overcome my enemies: you shall always share my joys, but suffer me to keep my griefs from your knowledge. Now I am triumphant, the favourite of the public again; and now you hear from me.

"A strange capricious master is the public; however, one consolation greater than any other, except one's own approbation, has been, that those whose suffrages I esteemed most have, through all my troubles, clasped me closer to their hearts; they have been the touchstone to prove who were really my friends. You will believe me when I affirm, that your friendship and my dear Mrs. Whalley's is an honour and a happiness I would not forego for any earthly consideration. Tell my dearest Mrs. Whalley that neither avocations nor indolence would have prevented your hearing from me long ago, but for the reasons already mentioned. I wrote to you last Sunday, when I had not received your dear letters; so you will do me the justice to

remember that I was not reminded of you but by my own heart, which, while it beats, will ever love you both with the warmest and truest affection; however, as she is so seldom mistaken, we shall have the honour and glory of laughing at her. Would to God I could laugh with, or cry with, or anything with you, but for half an hour! To say the truth though, your tender reproaches gave me a melancholy which I could not (and I don't know if I wished it) shake off. Pray let me hear from you very soon and very often. I shall be a better woman, and more worthy of your invaluable friendship, the more I converse with you. Surely the converse of good and gentle spirits is the nearest approach to heaven that we can know; therefore once more I beg that I may often hear from you; and if you do love me, do not think so unworthily of me as to suppose my affection can, in the nature of things, ever know the least abatement. I conjure you both to promise me this! for I cannot bear it—indeed I can't.

"I must beg you will not mention (I believe I am giving an unnecessary caution) anything I have told you concerning Mr. Pratt. I would not wish him to know, by any means, that I have been informed of his last unkindness, because it might prevent his asking

me to do him a favour, which I shall be at all times ready to grant, when in my power. I must tell you that after the very unkind letter he sent me, in answer to mine requesting the ten pounds, I never wrote to or heard from him until about three months ago, when he wrote to me as if he had never offered such an indignity, recommending a work which he had just finished to my attention. He did not tell me what this work was, but I had heard it was a tragedy. To be made a convenient acquaintance only, did not much gratify me; but, however, I wrote to say he knew the resolution I had been obliged to make (having made many enemies by reading some, and not being able to give time to read all tragedies), to read nobody's tragedy, and then no one could take offence; but that if it was accepted by the managers, and there was anything that I could be of service to him in (doing justice to myself), that I should be very happy to serve him. I have heard nothing of him since that time till within these few days, when he wrote to my sister Fanny, accusing me of ingratitude, and calling himself the ladder upon which I have mounted to fame, and which I am kicking down.

"What he means by ingratitude I am at a loss to guess, and I fancy he would be puzzled to explain;

our obligations were always, I believe, pretty mutual. However, in this letter to Fanny, he says he is going to publish a poem called 'Gratitude,' in which he means to show my avarice and meanness, and all the rest of my amiable qualities, to the world, for having dropped him, as he calls it, so injuriously, and banishing him my house. Now, as I hope for mercy, I permitted his visits at my house, after having discovered that he was taking every possible method to attach my sister to him, which you may be sure he took pains to conceal from us, and I had him to my parties long after I made this discovery. In short, till he chose to write this letter, which I disdained to reply to, he called as usual. He had the modesty to desist from calling on us from that time, and now has the goodness to throw this unmerited obloquy on me. I am so well convinced that a very plain tale will put him down, that his intention gives me very little concern. I am only grieved to see such daily instances of folly and wickedness in human nature. It is worth observing, too, that at the very time he chose to write this agreeable letter, I was using my best influences with Mr. Siddons to lend him the money I told you of before. I find he thinks it is not very prudent to quarrel with me, but has the effrontery to think that

I should make advances toward our reconcilement; but I will die first. 'My tow'ring virtue, from the assurance of my merit, scorns to stoop so low.' If he should come round of himself (for I have learnt that best of knowledge, to forgive), I will, out of respect of what I believe he once was, be of what service I can to him; for I believe he meant well at one time, when I knew him first, and the noblest vengeance is the most complete. Once more, your fingers on your lips, I pray!" *

* Whalley's Memoirs.

CHAPTER XVII.

MACBETH.

UP to this time we have lost sight of the other members of Roger Kemble's numerous family. It is curious to see how they appeared to fall short of each other in ability, after a steadily descending scale. Thus John had smaller powers than his sister, Charles less than John, Stephen less than Charles, and the sisters less again. Only for the fame and support of the eldest brother and sister the rest of the family would have doubtless remained in some of those lowly avocations where the good sense of their father had placed them.

Charles, when he was thirteen years old, was sent away by his brother's care and charges to Douai College, where he remained three years, and acquired a knowledge of foreign languages, and other accomplishments. In this brother there was a greater softness, with a sort of refinement of character. When he returned a situation was obtained for him

in the Post Office; but the theatrical taste of the family was too strong to be resisted, and very soon, disliking the slow promotion and monotony of the office, he was consulting his brother John and his friend Mr. Taylor as to the advisability of going on the stage.* The latter, from his rather rustic and uncouth manner, thought him unfitted for such a profession; and John Kemble took the same view. But no aspirant for the stage, although affecting to pay the compliment of asking advice, is ever known to be guided by what he receives, and the young man followed his inclinations at the time, and commenced his stage life at Sheffield in 1792. When Garrick brought over French dancers, and roused British patriotism to vindicate itself by a riot, there was in the *troupe* a little French girl of the name of De Camp. She remained after her friends had been driven back to their own country; learned English; obtained leave to try her powers at acting, and triumphed so successfully over all

* Mr. John Taylor, the author of "Monsieur Tonson," was later to marry a Miss Satchell, sister to the wife of Stephen. He was very intimate with the Kembles; and his "Records of My Life"—a "gossiping," but sensible collection of incidents in the lives of actors—is singularly entertaining, and contributes many little points to the history of the Kembles.

obstacles as to become a very intelligent and pleasing English actress. This lady became Mr. Charles Kemble's wife.*

The sisters of Mrs. Siddons also found their thoughts disturbed by theatrical dreams, and soon abandoned their work-rooms for the stage. Frances was handsome, her mind well cultivated, but her theatrical gifts strangely weak. She had an unaccountable diffidence which could not be overcome; but her figure and face were beautiful, and her eyes almost as brilliant as those of her sister. In our time her success would have been assured; but *then* some powers of acting were considered essential. It was her ill-fortune to be

* Mr. Boaden gives her character in the following singular encomium: "This young lady, carried into a family abounding in talent, had powers of so peculiar a kind, so perfect, so unapproachable, that if they were inferior as to their class, they shared a kindred pre-eminence. No one ever like her presented the charm of unsuspecting fondness. . . . *Double entendre* in her presence had nothing beyond that single sense which might meet the ear of modesty. I have often listened to the miserable counterfeit of what she was, and would preserve, if language could but do it, her lovely impersonation of artless truth. But it may be gathered critically in the abstract by the negative assistance of many of its modish imitators. The fancy may restore her, or be contented at least with its own creations." This seems very mysterious praise.

steadily assailed in Woodfall's paper in the most pitiless fashion, and when she went to Ireland her enemies pursued her there.

It is curious to see how unscrupulous was the hostility as well as the partisanship of the press during this time. The unfortunate *débutante* was almost made a victim, between the friends and enemies of her sister. One paper said that "Miss Kemble's attempt at Alicia shows, that the closest alliance may be in blood, without the least in genius. When any actor or actress is obliged to give up a character to make way for another, the person preferred ought, to make the preference an act of strict justice, to be many degrees superior to him or her who is put aside." Another spoke of her "transcendent merits." A third admitted that it was "natural for Mrs. Siddons to have a wish to bring Miss Kemble forward; but if she means to do it by cramming her down the throats of the public, in the above character, it is most likely that her fate will be similar to that of the *Fatal Interview*, which all Mrs. Siddons' excellence could not save from damnation. This ought to operate as a hint to her, and incline her to *desist from the attempt of finishing what the hand of nature never begun*." A fourth said she was received with an uncommon indulgence to

"which she had scarcely any pretensions." These attacks seemed cruel, but were in truth directed against her greater sister.

This persecution may have accounted for her nervousness; for her friends would find her bathed in tears over one of these attacks. However, she found a vigorous champion in the person of George Steevens, who wrote a spirited remonstrance, which Woodfall was just enough to insert, and who further promised to be less severe. This strange character, intolerant, violent, eccentric, as full of vehemence in his likings as in his animosities, fell desperately in love with the young actress, and his passion carried him to the length of depreciating Mrs. Siddons to raise her sister. And when the latter was to play in a new piece of Hayley's, Steevens —always "uniformly mischievous," said Johnson— wrote to the author to propose his writing some complimentary lines in praise of her playing, which the poet had not yet seen, and urged this deception with extraordinary eagerness and ardour. Hayley had it in his power "to do eminent service to a young and lovely girl." Her mind was "stronger and more cultivated than her sister's." He would persuade her further—to spare her delicacy—that Mr. Hayley

had come up *incog.* to see his own play, had returned into the country next morning, "and, not knowing her address, intrusted me with the delivery of his compliment." He assured him he was "one of the few people whom one can venture to solicit in the cause of an honest woman;" the value of which compliment is somewhat lessened by the fact that the poet must have been one of the few to whom he could venture to propose and ask a subterfuge. Hayley coolly put this request aside with an assurance that no poetical praise could animate the young lady so highly as that which flowed from Steevens' pen. "Were she not contented with this, she could but ill deserve the panegyric of any other encomiast." Steevens became his enemy for life.

It was given presently out that this ardent admirer was to be married to Miss Kemble; but he was found too vehement and impracticable a suitor. His proposals seemed to have been entertained for a time, but they were naturally not approved by Mrs. Siddons. "My sister Frances," she wrote to her friend, Mr. Whalley, "is not married, and I believe there is very little reason to suppose she will be soon. In point of circumstances I believe the gentleman you mention would be a desirable husband; but I

hear so much of his ill-temper, and know so much of his caprice, that though my sister, I believe, likes him, I cannot wish her gentle spirit linked with his." This little character shows Mrs. Siddons' acuteness; for it describes Steevens exactly. John Kemble looked on gloomily and with open disdain, at the affair, which was soon broken off, and the young lady later married Mr. Twiss, another dramatic critic, brother to the gentleman whose extraordinary "Book of Irish Travels" excited a storm of ridicule and resentment in that country. Her son was the better known Mr. Horace Twiss.

Even on this occasion the free-and-easy familiarities of the newspapers pursued her. "The nuptials of Miss Kemble," wrote one scribe, "which were to have been celebrated last Wednesday, were postponed to this morning, when the ceremony will take place. On the former day she wept so much as to be unfit for any part except the *Mourning Bride!*" Long after, in 1807, she was at Bath, keeping a "genteel seminary," as will be seen from the following characteristic advertisement:—"Mrs. Twiss, No. 24, Camden-place, Bath, receives under her care young ladies from the age of 14 to 20. Board 100 guineas per annum. Entrance five guineas. The young ladies may be in-

troduced into the best company, and the utmost attention will be paid to their morals, conduct, and manners. Masters will be provided to teach such accomplishments as may be thought necessary. Mrs. Twiss has no objection to taking a few young ladies of any age under twelve. Board and washing, English, French, Italian, Writing, and Arithmetic, 100 guineas per annum. Entrance five guineas. In each year one vacation only, which will last six weeks. Three months' notice will be required on the removal of any young lady." She died in October, 1822, and her husband survived until 1827.*

Another sister, Elizabeth, was also unable to resist the same attraction of the stage, and, through Mrs. Siddons' interest, obtained an engagement in London. "This lady," says Mr. Boaden, "through her private studies, became a very striking ornament of her distinguished family;" but these did not help her to ornament the profession she had adopted. But she did not desert it, and married, in 1785, a Mr. Whitlock, one of the

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* The late Mr. Winston, of the Garrick Club, collected a quantity of letters, memoranda, and newspaper cuttings, relating to the different members of the family, which I have used largely in the present work.

managers of the Chester company, and went with him to America.*

There was another of her sisters who had turned such talent as she possessed into a less respectable course, and the malicious took care to call attention to her low position, while her more fortunate sister was rolling in her carriage. This unfortunate woman, Mrs. Curtis, was to become connected with the notorious Dr. Graham, who exhibited a "Temple of Health," earth baths, and such quackeries. Yet another sister, Jane, who had married a Mr. Mason, of Edinburgh, also found her way to the stage, appearing when she was only nineteen at Newcastle. After Mrs. Siddons' retirement, she obtained an engagement in London, at the Haymarket, in the year 1814. She was found to have the old Kemble blemishes of pauses, and over-study; and "her short, very short and lusty figure," said a critic, "had a ludicrous effect." The part was Lady Randolph; and when a character in the play, describing her death, announced that "she ran, she flew, like lightning up the hill," the audience roared with laughter. She never repeated the part.

* He died there. She returned to Europe, reappeared at Drury Lane in 1807 with indifferent success. She survived her great brother and sister.

She died in 1834, leaving a husband and five sons and a daughter, "all on the stage," said the obituary notice of her death. The truth was that nearly all the members of Roger Kemble's family hoped to succeed through the aid of the reputations of their great brother and sister.

The remaining three are said to have died in infancy or very young. Mrs. Siddons always helped them, and was a kind sister; though she once exclaimed, pathetically, to Mr. Rogers, "Alas! after I became celebrated none of my sisters loved me as before!" "Conversation" Sharp was often consulted by her in these family troubles. She would come to him in tears—as he has told a lady now alive—over the ingratitude of her sisters. Large sums were lent, never repaid, and the obligation seemed only to produce bitterness and unkindness.

For all this unlucky inauguration the new season was to be the most remarkable in her career, as well as in that of her brother, for it was to fix her imperishably in the world's recollection as the grandest interpreter of Shakspeare. Her Lady Macbeth, and John Kemble's Macbeth, were now to be played, not for the mere ephemeral audience of the time, but for all later generations—and this is the wonderful compensation with which Shakspeare repays those

who devote themselves to the service of his genius. Had these artists been content with such characters as Isabella, Murphy's Euphrasia, and Beverley, their merits with succeeding generations would have been of an indistinct cloudy sort, and recommended to us merely by the general raptures of those who saw them. But the Macbeth, Coriolanus, and King John, of Shakspeare, are more familiar to us than the same characters in the historical chronicles: these are creatures of flesh and blood, and, as we read, we almost see Mrs. Siddons and Kemble with a distinctness and vitality which, under other conditions, might have been despaired of. Nothing, too, was more characteristic in those great artists than their sure and almost cautious advance. They, as it were, educated themselves, and grew greater every year; whereas Garrick, on the contrary, gained all his chief victories at once. This might show a greater *natural* genius in him; and it raises the question as to the value of spontaneous and irresistible gifts by the side of those which develop slowly, and by the aid of thought and study.

While this great restoration in the fortunes of the theatre was going on, the one that was perhaps least concerned was the one most interested—the pleasant and eccentric Brinsley. Politics had begun to dis-

tract his attention, and he was already preparing for his great impeachment of Hastings. The tears, too, he had shed so profusely at Mrs. Siddons' Isabella had long since ceased to flow, and the habitual calm or indifference of the actress had produced its effect on him. He seemed to regard her without very much cordiality, though he did not apparently interfere with her plans. Her brother he liked, chiefly on account of a tempered conviviality which few would have suspected in the former theological student, who was supposed to be too austere for such joys.

The incidents connected with Sheridan's direction of the theatre are almost too familiar to be entered on here; but the most wonderful phenomenon must certainly be considered his almost miraculous purchase of the patent, or rather contract for the purchase. With so great a stake in the concern his *poco curante* management seems surprising. But his amazing good fortune held to him; and the two great artists, with some successful plays of his own, tided him over many years of difficulty. His ingenious shifts and skilful avoidance of duns and authors, have furnished many droll stories to the jest-books. His house of a morning presented the appearance of a fashionable doctor's, the visitors being distributed according to their rank through the different rooms;

friends waiting in the library, strangers in the parlour, tradesmen dispersed through the halls, passages, and butler's rooms. Mr. Boaden met Kemble in the library one morning, whom he found amusing himself with one of the vast pile of MS. dramas which were waiting a perusal they never were to receive; and the actor told pleasantly how these poor pieces became his usual entertainment during his long stay. Mr. Boaden gives a little sketch of the scene: "A door opening above stairs, moved all the hopes below; but when he came down his hair was dressed for the day, and his countenance for the occasion; and so cordial were his manners, his glance so masterly, and his address so captivating, that the people, for the most part, seemed to forget what they actually wanted, and went away as if they had only come to look at him."

The fortunes of the brother were not advancing with nearly the rapidity of those of the sister, and this not through want of any favour on the part of the manager. Though discipline behind the curtain had been sadly relaxed, still the traditions which favoured the claims of mediocrity were rigorously enforced; and the new actor, who was confessedly at the head of the serious players of the company, was jealously excluded from any characters which were in possession

of the older actors; he was therefore obliged to cast about either for entirely new characters or for such as they were inclined from age to forego. Nothing could exceed the quiet forbearance with which he accepted this position; a perfect confidence in his own future never deserted him, and he devoted this interval to an almost severe and conscientious course of study. Part of his slender means he devoted to the purchase of theoretical books on the drama, and of those rarer copies of old plays which in time grew into a fine collection. Among his friends were commentators on Shakspeare, like Malone, Steevens, or Reed. He gradually widened the circle of his friends, till it included most of the remarkable men whom it was a credit to know. And it is evidence of nice and zealous accuracy of study that he took the trouble of copying out his Shakspearian parts from the best editions, instead of accepting the rough and clumsy versions made by the copyists of the theatre. How necessary this was may be conceived when many leading artists, like Mrs. Pritchard, were not inclined to burthen their memories, and never troubled themselves with knowing what took place when they were off the stage. The evenings he devoted to his friends. He might smile at the feeble attempt made to diminish his reputation, by starting new rivals at the

other house; and it was with this view that Holman, a handsome young actor, was put forward, not so much in the hope of genuine rivalry, as of giving an opportunity to the scribblers to depreciate Kemble. But it was soon found there was not much danger to be apprehended.

With this new season returned to his double duty of stage manager and actor the veteran King, whose Lord Ogleby was one of those firm, round, vigorous bits of character-painting which, repeated again and again, was always the same, and of which the public was as likely to tire as of one of Hogarth's pictures. It was on the 3rd September 1784 that he had spoken one of those familiar prologues which were *de rigueur* then, and which were the neutral ground on which actor and audience might condescend to familiarity without loss of respect on either side. This I take to have been the explanation of those abundant prologues and epilogues with which almost every play was fitted.* In this address he had spoken of his late master, Garrick; and, as if to deprecate a dissatisfaction of which

* Nowadays we have "speeches." Often in the worst taste, and almost impertinent, the actor tells his "patrons" he is so pleased with his reception that when he returns he would like to choose a wife from the audience; that he is obliged to run and catch his train, &c. These familiarities are to be heard at many theatres.

he had had ominous warnings, alluded to the great actress who was the support of the house, speaking of "her living worth." This awkward compliment was challenged by not a few; still no one in the theatre could have dreamed of the revulsion that was to take place in a few days. In a very few weeks she was to vindicate herself so magnificently and triumphantly that detractors and enemies were struck dumb. It was to be the most appropriate and effective refutation of calumny that could be conceived. Those who had thought she had reached almost beyond the human standard of excellence were confounded to find her soaring as high again beyond that limit; yet here once more everything was against her. Critics said she shrank from those great plays of Shakspeare from a sense of weakness, knowing that contact with this grand work would shiver her reputation like glass; and the proprietor himself, it was often complained, had almost a prejudice against bringing forward plays of Shakspeare. They were right: failure might have destroyed her reputation; but the courageous woman was fitted for her task—she had studied Lady Macbeth, as some little notes of hers show, on the truest principles, weighing, comparing, experimenting, until she had worked out a grand, consistent, and truly effective theory of Lady Macbeth's character.

This once settled and fixed firmly, every stroke she dealt was directed to that one aim, and, as the result of such concentrated unity of purpose, success was certain. As she said herself, acutely, one could give the feelings of a wife or mother from personal experience, but with this wonderful character there were no such precedents to follow—it must be an effort of the judgment. Here was to be no overwhelming burst of inspiration, carrying all before it, but genius directed and regulated by the truest principles.

The night was the 2nd of February. Smith, a veteran—"the genteel, the airy, and the smart" of Churchill—had chosen to assert his claim to the character of Macbeth, a terrible disadvantage for the actress; and an incident occurred just before the play began which utterly discomposed her. It was her excellent custom, as it had been that of Garrick, to devote some time before the play began to a sort of "retreat," during which she composed herself to think only of the character she was about to assume. She had finished her toilette—but she describes the scene admirably in her own way: "When, just as I had finished my toilette, and was pondering with fearfulness my first appearance in the grand fiendish part, comes Mr. Sheridan knocking at my door, and insist-

ing, in spite of all my entreaties not to be interrupted at this to me tremendous moment, to be admitted. He would not be denied admittance, for he protested he must speak to me on a circumstance which so deeply concerned my own interest, that it was of the most serious nature. Well, after much squabbling I was compelled to admit him, that I might dismiss him the sooner and compose myself before the play began. But what was my distress and astonishment when I found that he wanted me even at this moment of anxiety and terror to adopt another mode of acting the sleeping scene! He told me that he had heard with the greatest surprise and concern that I meant to act it without holding the candle in my hand; and when I argued the impracticability of washing out that '*damned spot*' that was certainly implied by both her own words and by those of her gentlewoman, he insisted, that if I did put the candle out of my hand it would be thought a presumptuous innovation, as Mrs. Pritchard had always retained it in hers. My mind, however, was made up, and it was then too late to make me alter it, for I was too agitated to adopt another method. My deference for Mr. Sheridan's taste and judgment was, however, so great, that, had he proposed the alteration whilst it was possible for

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Mrs Siddons in Lady Macbeth.

me to change my own plan I should have yielded to his suggestion; though even then it would have been against my own opinion, and my observation of the accuracy with which somnambulists perform all the acts of waking persons. The scene of course was acted as I had myself conceived it, and the innovation, as Mr. Sheridan called it, was received with approbation. Mr. Sheridan himself came to me after the play, and most ingenuously congratulated me on my obstinacy."

This concern as to the probability of such an intrusion disturbing all her ideas is quite intelligible; but the vehement dispute about holding the candle might seem to be attaching too much importance to a trifle. And yet, as will be seen later, a real principle was involved. Though, it might be urged, and "Elia" supports the view, that in that terrible play we never think of such a trifle as whether she lays down the candle or not; in fact, that actual washing of the hands rather belongs to a much lower histrionic school. However, such matters we should approach with reverence, as the great artist had laid out a complete and harmonious scheme in which everything had been carefully considered.

Further on we shall consider the features of this

thrilling performance. The ghost of Mrs. Pritchard, as she says, haunted her; and there were hundreds present who had seen Garrick and that great actress in what was vulgarly called "the dagger scene." We ourselves, by turning to a familiar old mezzotint, can see this great pair as they played it. There is a certain grotesqueness in their costume; and Garrick, in the wig and court dress of the period, breeches, stockings, and braided coat, looks like a country squire. But with these drawbacks, there is a mysterious horror over the picture.*

The Macbeth was very indifferent, with his imperfect elocution, suited to the gentleman of comedy; and making the boards creak as, with a ludicrous solemnity, he walked in the solemn scene. But the surpassing genius of the actress, it was admitted, had eclipsed the recalled glories of Mrs. Pritchard.† Arrayed in a cloud of white drapery, she threw an appalling mystery over the part. Sir Joshua was in the orchestra, which with portions of the pit had been

* It was humorously likened by Kemble to the butler and housemaid having a quarrel over the carving-knife.

† If, as Johnson stated before Mrs. Siddons' performance, Mrs. Pritchard had never read the last act of *Macbeth*, and was, besides, a "vulgar creature," Mrs. Siddons need not have been so apprehensive.

"laid into boxes" for her benefit, and glittered with diamonds and beauty. Everything about the performance was striking, new, and impressive; and though the costumes were indifferent, there were many who contrasted with the costly and elaborate pageantry of later revivals the simple and unadorned power of the artist who of herself *filled the stage*, and by her genius seemed to furnish scenery, dresses, magnificence—everything. It was a real triumph.* This fine performance brought forth a sarcastic and ungracious letter, attributed to Steevens, in which an allusion to the banqueting-room was turned with some wit to a satire on her frugal hospitality.† It were well, how-

* At such a moment of success, with the shouts of the audience in her ears, the careful prudence of the actress is revealed in a most characteristic way: "While standing up before my glass," she says, "and taking off my mantle, a diverting circumstance occurred, to chase away the feelings of this anxious night; for, *while I was repeating, and endeavouring to call to mind the appropriate tone and action to the following words*, 'Here's the smell of blood still!' my dresser innocently exclaimed, 'Dear me, ma'am, how very hysterical you are to-night; I protest and vow, ma'am, it was not blood, but rose-pink and water; for I saw the property-man mix it up with my own eyes.'"

† Smith, who played Macbeth, and who had wasted his means in conviviality, was described as being an utter enemy to all conviviality, and therefore "gave his welcome to the nobles of Scotland with the coldness that might have been expected from one who was compelled to counterfeit an office, from which, had it been real, his

ever, if Steevens' animosities had been always limited to such pasquinade as this. "Over violent and horrible as the part is," said the judicious critic of the "European Magazine," "she over acts it." But the heresy of the candle, "inexcusable even in a young performer," raised a storm which justified Sheridan's misgivings.

Presently this wonderful woman was to confound both admirers and enemies by exhibition of gifts in quite another direction. To her brother's Othello she was soon to play Desdemona with a softness and winning grace that actually drew the affections of the audience to her. Mr. Campbell, who was listening, could not bring himself to believe that it could be her; and Mr. Boaden recalled fondly the "tender emotions she excited in him." But he had to admit that "she was too heroic in her person" to give the character with all effect. Her brother's Othello was an advance towards those grand and majestic interpretations for which he was later to be

heart would have revolted . . . . The soul of Mrs. Siddons, on the contrary (Mrs. Siddons, whose dinners and suppers are proverbially numerous), expanded on this occasion. She spoke her joy on seeing so many guests with an earnestness little short of rapture. Her address appeared so like reality that all her hearers about her seized the wooden fowls," &c.—*Public Advertiser.*

famous. But we may smile at his English general officer's uniform. He later played Macbeth for his own benefit, supported by his sister, again to the highest admiration, even of Woodfall. Beside this masterpiece Othello might be counted a failure. The results of his study were at once admitted, his "endeavours" being allowed to "be extremely various." The applause was unbounded. The Duke of Richmond, Lady Ossory, old Lord Fauconberg, Sterne's patron, were in the pit, and Woodfall, congratulating him, heartily wished he might remain in possession of the part. To his sister the seductive power of her Desdemona no doubt suggested a further experiment in the same direction. What if she made trial of those powers of comedy which had been found so satisfactory at Bath and in the York circuit? She had now an interval in which to prepare herself; for she was obliged to withdraw for a time, owing to a rheumatic fever she had contracted from an odd accident. Desdemona's stage-bed had not been aired, which seems evidence of carelessness and of bad supervision in stage management.* When she recovered she chose the gay and airy Rosalind, which, com-

* But not surely "criminal negligence," as Mr. Campbell wrathfully calls it.

bining lightness with yet a Shakspearian sobriety, seems to have been a little beyond her strength. For there was this disadvantage in her combination of the two departments; her tragedy was so directed by study and thought that it became impossible to prevent her comedy showing the same influences, whereas the French vivacity of Garrick, joined to the spontaneous character of his genius, prevented *his* comedy being thus affected. The town was not a little amused at her dress—mysterious nondescript garments that were neither male nor female—devised to satisfy a prudery which in such a play was wholly out of place. Not satisfied with this experiment, she determined to revive a part even yet more familiar to her, Mrs. Lovemore, in Murphy's excellent comedy, *The Way to Keep Him*—that of a neglected wife encouraged to vindicate wrongs by a little coquetry. Here was a fitting test, for there was room for the artificial and conventional gaiety which every-day comedy required. But it would not do; the *physique* and manner were found "lumbering," if the word be not profane as applied to her. The feeling left behind was that all was heavy and tragic. She was, besides, contrasted with Miss Farren, a true *comédienne*, who was playing the

Widow Belmore with irresistible gaiety and spirit, with a face and figure that perfectly harmonized. But it is really hard to decide this question of her power in comedy, as there are loud voices raised on both sides. Yet in private life she had abundance of quiet gaiety, and told a story with singular vivacity and humour. But the most probable solution would appear to be the one alluded to before, that her tragic studies, her tall, full, majestic figure, and her age, all made so much dead weight to struggle against. Anticipating a little—for the mere cataloguing of plays is a dreary task—we may notice her attempt at Imogen and Ophelia, both characters again unsuited to her. It is evident that the matronly Lady Macbeth and the Lady Macbeth who had stamped such an impression of herself on the audience, could have nothing in common with the frail young girl, "the fair Ophelia." This was getting on dangerous ground. Even those who praise her rest their admiration on detached portions—the "mad scene"—where she rose to herself. So with Imogen. But when she attempted to join in the boisterous animation of Catherine and Petruchio, which was then fashioned into a farce, we begin to think once more of Hazlitt's philosophical question, "whether actors should be

seen in the boxes," or whether a *tragédienne* does not injure by these light associations the grave effect she means to produce in tragedy. Her Cordelia, too, was open to the same objection.

But all these characters shall be reviewed when we come to consider the readings of her characters in detail. It is enough to say here that her success in comedy was only indifferent.

Practical homage to her success was given in the fact that her salary now stood at the figure of twenty-four pounds ten a week, that of her brother at ten guineas. With this handsome sum and her allowances she might have been content, especially as there were some signs of illness and overwork; but she at once started off on a laborious tour down to Manchester, Liverpool, Edinburgh, Belfast, and Glasgow. "Only the previous year," Dr. Doran says, "she had performed the *tour de force* of playing in London, Bath, and Reading, all within four days." In July, 1785, she was at her "dear Edinburgh once more," where her success exceeded even that of her former visit. Every night, as soon as the play was over, the strange spectacle was witnessed of servants and porters arriving to take their places in a sort of *queue*, actually passing the whole night there until the

box-office opened the following morning! Connected with one of these visits was that terrible scene during the performance of her Isabella. When the actress uttered her piteous cry, "O, my Biron!" Miss Gordon of Gight made the house resound with her fearful shrieks, repeating the words, "O, my Biron!" and was carried out still screaming.* Mrs. Siddons played fourteen or fifteen nights to an average of about one hundred pounds a night, her own benefit bringing two hundred pounds, exclusive of those welcome "gold tickets," a form of compliment now obsolete, enthusiastic admirers endorsing their patronage with a present of forty or fifty pounds. On the other nights her Isabella brought the highest receipts, while her performance for the players' benefit furnished only sixty pounds. Thousands once more collected at her lodgings to get a glimpse of the great player, and this we may take to be no exhibition of vulgar curiosity, but to arise from the identifying her with the tremendous characters she played. Scarcely so com-

* The strange part of the story is that she later became the mother of Lord Byron, who at one time affected to spell his name, "Biron." Lady Gray of Gask told Mr. Robert Chambers, who repeated the story to Dr. Doran, that he never could forget that cry of Mrs. Siddons, "O, my Biron!"

plimentary was a countryman's remark at Glasgow, that "she was a fallen angel!"

She was fortunate in having friends who were only too eager to welcome her at their country houses, which, besides, afforded the wearied actress an opportunity of recruiting her strength. Among these were Lady Harcourt, at Nuneham, whose lord she described to be "a queer, odd sort of body," and the Greatheads, at whose place she must have found herself with very curious feelings. Her sketch of Mason, whom she met at the Harcourts, quoted by Mr. Campbell, is so spirited that it will be worth introducing here:—

"When I was on my usual visit to this beautiful place," she says, "I have often walked arm-in-arm with the author of *Caractacus*, and the amiable Whitehead. The former of these gentlemen, before I made his acquaintance, had conceived an inveterate dislike to me: he was a great humorist; but with all his oddities, a benevolent man. He was petted and coaxed by Lord Harcourt, and by all the visitors indeed, like a spoilt child. He hated me because he could not bear that I should be even compared with his departed friend and favourite, Mrs. Pritchard; and was so annoyed at the sound of my name, that,

in order playfully to humour his prejudice, they sunk it, and always in his hearing called me 'the Lady.' I arrived there at tea-time, and found him looking very sulky indeed, wrapped up in his Spanish cloak, which he called being out of humour. We happened somehow to be near each other at supper. I found his ice beginning to thaw; and the next morning, to the great amusement of the whole party, we were detected practising a duet in the breakfast-room. From that time forth I had the honour of being in his good graces, for the too short period of his pious and valuable existence. When I arrived at his own habitation, on a visit for a few days, they told us he was absent, but would soon return. In the meantime, Mr. Siddons and I strolled to see him; and when we entered, we saw the venerable man, the almost adored parish priest, in the organ-loft, teaching the children some music for the next Sunday. We left him undisturbed in his pious occupation, and returned to his house, where he soon received us with heartfelt cordiality. He spoke broad Yorkshire, and good-naturedly allowed us to accuse him of affectation in so doing; though I believe he was only affecting what was so natural to him that he could not avoid it."

The result of this friendship was her taking a part in his play of *Elfrida*, more a poem for a closet, and utterly unsuited to the stage. She had to pay too many of these compliments during her career; and when the great pressure of private friendship was used, it is amusing to see how she defended herself.

On the same principle Mr. Greathead pressed a tragedy of his own on her, and though old recollections and his "patronage," as it would then be called, were strong inducements, she was firm enough to resist the pressure, for a time, at least. Her letter in reference to it is highly characteristic. "The plot of the piece," she says, "of the poor young man, it strikes me, is very lame, and the characters very, very ill-sustained in general, but more particularly the lady, for whom the author had me in his eye. This woman is one of those monsters (I think them) of perfection, who is an angel before her time, and is so entirely resigned to the will of heaven, that (to a very mortal like myself) she appears to be the most provoking piece of still life one ever had the misfortune to meet. Her struggles and conflicts are so weakly expressed that we conclude they do not cost her much pain, and she is so pious that we are satisfied she looks

upon her afflictions as so many convoys to heaven, and wish her there, or anywhere else but in the tragedy. I have said all this, and ten times more, to them both, with as much delicacy as I am mistress of; but Mr. G. says that it would give him no great trouble to alter it, so that he seems determined to endeavour to bring it on the stage, provided I will undertake this milksop lady. I am in a very distressed situation, for unless he makes her a totally different character, I cannot possibly have anything to do with her."

The "poor young man" eventually succeeded in his exertions: his piece was brought forward, only to fail disastrously. It would be a hard task to be on easy terms with a family where, only a few years before, one had performed the duties of lady's maid. But the great actress was above such littleness, and made them her firm friends. It was hardly surprising that Mrs. Greathead, as she confessed to "Conversation" Sharp, should have always felt, in those days of servitude, an irresistible inclination to rise from her chair when her maid came to attend her!

CHAPTER XVIII.

DOMESTIC EVENTS.

IN December, 1785, she had been obliged to interrupt her run of performances, when another of her children was born. She announces "the event" in a curious letter to her friend Whalley. The scandal as to Mrs. Fitzherbert had long since been cleared up.

"January 12th, 1786.

"All is well over, my dear Mr. Whalley. I have another son, healthy and lovely as an angel, born the 26th of December; so you see I take the earliest opportunity of relieving the anxiety, which I know you and my dear Mrs. Whalley will feel till you hear of me. My sweet boy is so like a person of the Royal Family, that I'm rather afraid he'll bring me to disgrace; my sister jokingly tells him she's sure 'my lady his mother has played false with the Prince,' and I must own he's more like him than anybody else. I will just hint to you that my father was at one time very like the King, which a little saves my

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Mrs Siddons

IN HER 30TH YEAR.

credit. I rejoice that you are well, and have such pleasant society, but I wish to God you would return! I have no news for you, except that the Prince is going to devote himself entirely to a Mrs. Fitzherbert, and the whole world is in an uproar about it. I know very little of her history, more than that it is agreed on all hands that she is a very ambitious and clever woman, and that 'all good seeming by her revolt will be thought put on for villany,' for she was thought an example of propriety. I hear, too, that the Duchess of Devonshire is to take her by the hand, and to give her the first dinner when the preliminaries are settled; for it seems everything goes on with the utmost formality; provision made for children, and so on. Some people rejoice and some mourn at this event. I have not heard what his mother says to it. The Royal Family have been nearly all ill, but are now recovering, and they graciously intend to command me to play in *The Way to Keep Him*, the first night I perform. They are gracious to me beyond measure on all occasions, and take all opportunities to show the world that they are so. How good and considerate is this! They know what a sanction their countenance is, and they are amiable beyond description. Since my confinement, I have received the kindest messages

from them ; they make me of consequence enough to desire I wont think of playing till I feel quite strong, and a thousand more kind things. I perceive a little shooting in my temples, that tells me I have written enough. I don't take leave of you, however, without telling you that I am very much disappointed in Sherriffe's picture of me, and am afraid to employ him about your snuff-box. I don't know what to do about it, for that promised to be so well that I almost engaged him in the fulness of my heart to do it. I have not been in face these last four months, but now that I am growing as amiable as ever, I shall sit for it as soon as possible. God Almighty bless you both ! Yours, S. Siddons."

After this round of business and pleasure she might now fairly take rest, for she was enabled to write joyfully and thankfully to her dearest friend that she had put by a sum of ten thousand pounds. This was creditable to her thrift after only four years' work, and proves how handsomely the public had supported her. "I have at last, my friend," she says, "attained the *ten thousand pounds* which I set my heart upon, and am now perfectly at ease with respect to fortune. I thank God, who has enabled me to procure to myself so comfortable an income. I am sure, my

dear Mrs. Whalley and you will be pleased to hear this from myself." In the same letter she opens her heart with a charming confidence: "What a thing a balloon would be! but, the deuce take them, I do not find that they are likely to be brought to any good. Good heaven! what delight it would be to see you for a few days only! I have a nice house, and I could contrive to make up a bed. I know you and my dear Mrs. Whalley would accept my sincere endeavours to accommodate you; but don't let me be taken by surprise, my dear friend, for were I to see you first at the theatre, I can't answer for what might be the consequence. I stand some knocks with tolerable firmness, I suppose from habit; but those of joy being so infinitely less frequent, I conceive must be more difficultly sustained. You will find I have been a niggard of my praise, when you see your Fanny. Oh! my beloved friend, you could not speak to one who understands those anxieties you mention better than I do. Surely it is needless to say no one more ardently prays that God Almighty, in His mercy, will avert the calamity; and surely, surely there is everything to hope for from such dispositions, improved by such an education. My family is well, God be praised! My two sisters are married and

happy. Mrs. Twiss will present us with a new relation towards February. At Christmas I bring my dear girls from Miss Eames, or rather, she brings them to me. Eliza is the most entertaining creature in the world; Sally is vastly clever; Maria and George are beautiful; and Harry a boy with very good parts, but not disposed to learning."

All this was so much wear and tear. Even now, artists complain of the fatigue of a journey to Aberdeen; but in those remote posting days the fatigue must have been excessive. Thus when, in 1786, she had entered on a Yorkshire tour, playing for her brother's old friend, Tate Wilkinson, her exertions were enough to enfeeble her health. That quaint chronicler recalls these great glories for his humble circuit. As was before remarked, this descending to a class of theatre where she had never played before, save in her obscure days, was almost unprecedented in an artist of her standing. Edinburgh and Bath were only in the due course, but the little theatres of Leeds and Hull were surely not a fitting arena for her gifts. She appeared at York on July 29th, during the assize week, when the town was full. "It was incredible," says the old manager, "what a rage there was to see her; and York can boast the greatest

receipts of any place out of London." An obscure actor, but one of promise, was engaged to play the leading parts with her; and when we think that this was Cooke, before he had abandoned himself to sottishness and a reckless indifference to his own good name, we can conceive what good acting was witnessed in the little York Theatre. He was found so satisfactory that he was later engaged to proceed with her to Chester. Seventeen nights' playing on the circuit brought in eleven hundred pounds; the expenses, however, says Tate, were enormous, while the actress's gains, rigidly deducted, left him but one hundred and twenty-eight pounds. For with these large sums which were invariably received, the actress's plans of emolument were so skilfully contrived as to leave the manager virtually a loser. She then flew to Hull, thence back again to York for three nights only, on the last of which the galleries were so uproarious that not a word of the play could be heard. She then appeared at Leeds for four nights, where over four hundred pounds poured into the treasury. The account of this gala time is given most graphically. Wakefield was displeased with the manager of the circuit for not bringing the great actress; angry and sarcastic letters appeared in the

local papers, and, at a less excited time, Mr. Wilkinson would be made to regret that he had treated them with such neglect. But what could be done, as she had to play at Liverpool? However, she "stretched a point to serve him:" and presently was hurrying from town to town, the manager and his *troupe* following in post-chaises, contriving to give the Wakefieldians one night, on the Wednesday, and appearing at Liverpool on the Friday. "Good God!" exclaims the manager, justly enough, "what real fatigue!" the acting alone being sufficient to tire her out, without these tremendous journeys. Though she had wished to "stretch a point" to oblige her manager, still the Wakefield expedition brought him in but four pounds profit, while it filled her purse. The earning such large sums was very tempting. No wonder she said she liked the country theatres, and her acting no doubt in these small buildings must have had tenfold the effect on the spectators. Every glance, every look, the slightest whisper, must have been magnified, as it were: so the provincials must have seen what were her finest performances. She used to say that she was more at home and more confident at such places; whereas she never entered on a London stage without nervousness. Nothing is indeed more pleasant to read than the accounts of the honest dramatic en-

thusiasm which obtained in these rude districts, and the pictures of country town life; and the odd relations between the gentry and the players, as set out in Tate Wilkinson's "Recollections," are most graphic illustrations of social life.

To her brother John this ground was more familiar. He, too, knew well how productive it could be made. In the August of 1788, during the York race week, he came down to his old manager, and the temptation must have been strong, as his engagement in a new post at Drury Lane must have been already concluded. He went through all his leading characters, Hamlet, Othello, Macbeth, Richard, and besides, read "The Story of Le Fevre." He was ill—had to be blistered—yet still continued his tour to Leeds and Wakefield, and one night was suffering so much that he could not appear. Public indignation turned on the manager. Many had come from Bradford to hear Mr. Kemble. Why not have "billed" the town?—why change the play? At Wakefield he played to poor houses; but he was still ill, and it was, besides, the week before the races. He promised his old manager a night when he would play gratis for him; "but illness and ill-humour," says the latter, "prevented him." He was eager to get back to London, for, "though not a miser," adds Wil-

kinson, "he did not hate money." Indeed, the old manager, who had acted with Foote and Garrick, had a good deal of pride in his profession, and was content to overlook his stinted profits in the flood of glory cast upon the York circuit. That both Kemble and his sister were a little exacting in their dealings with their profession has been shown; but we may pass on to another little scene, which illustrates Kemble's life at the country theatres, while, though it anticipates by some years, may be appropriately introduced at this place.

During the August of 1791 a great musical festival was being given at York, when Madame Mara, the charming Mrs. Crouch, and Kelly were engaged to sing. Mr. and Mrs. Kemble were on a visit to the Lord Mayor of York, halting there before they passed on to Liverpool. The town was crammed, the theatre in Blake Street open, and Mr. Wilkinson full of excitement. He was at his wit's end, in consequence of a quarrel with Mrs. Jordan, when he heard of Kemble's arrival. He rushed to the mayor's house at night, and found the actor just going to bed, who received him cordially, assured him he should be delighted to play for him, but that he was too unwell; that, if he could play anywhere, he was bound

to appear at Liverpool. The matter was therefore given up; but on the Sunday afternoon Kemble and the Lord Mayor called on him, and the former announced that if some sort of exchange could be arranged with Mrs. Jordan, that is, if she could be got to take his engagement at Newcastle, he would play on the Wednesday night for thirty guineas, which he must have. Wilkinson said that "pounds" was what Mrs. Jordan was to have received; Kemble replied, that if his terms were not agreed to there was an end of the matter. The manager had of course to consent. This seemed a little "hard" with a manager with whom he had worked so long; but still he was *dans son droit*. The agreement was concluded, and the following bill issued:—

THEATRE ROYAL, YORK.

Monday, August 15th, 1791.

Mr. Wilkinson is under the disagreeable necessity of closing the Theatre this evening, as Mrs. JORDAN has positively declined any future performance on this stage. Mr. Wilkinson is extremely sorry for the disappointment, but has the unexpected satisfaction of informing the public that

MR. KEMBLE,

(*Manager of the Theatre Royal Drury Lane*),

(Whose abilities are universally known and established),

Perceiving Mr. Wilkinson's embarrassed situation, has kindly offered his assistance during this festival week, and will appear to-morrow in the character of

OTHELLO, MOOR OF VENICE.

On Monday Mr. and Mrs. Kemble graciously came to dine with Mr. Tate Wilkinson. After dinner, when the ladies had gone upstairs, Mr. Kemble told his host quietly that the thirty guineas would not do, and that he must have one-half the clear receipts. This, it will be recollected, was exactly following the precedent of his sister's behaviour at Edinburgh, and was certainly founded on the same motive. He had seen the crowd and excitement in the town, and began to repent of having made a bargain which did not let him profit by such a crowd. The manager, indignant at this grasping disposition, refused. On the next day both went to the Lord Burlington Assembly-rooms, where, as they were thundering out the "Hailstone Chorus," a terrific storm came on suddenly, with crashes of thunder, the room lit up with flashes of lightning, the ladies fainting. There Mr. Kemble was congratulated by several of the gentlemen on the pleasure he was about to afford them. He answered calmly and complacently that he did not think he would play. "This immediately caused a buzz." The bills were all printed and posted. The poor manager went to the Lord Mayor's in great anxiety, found Mrs. Kemble in tears, the Lord Mayor much annoyed about the business, and Kemble asleep in his room, and not

to be disturbed. Tuesday came, when Wilkinson received a haughty note from the actor, to the effect that he was much surprised to see his name in the bills. He "had done himself the honour" to tell Wilkinson that unless for half the receipts "he could not have the pleasure of appearing." With a heavy heart the other was preparing a new bill, with "a note" explaining the matter to the York public, and substituting *The Battle of Hexham*, when the Lord Mayor, concerned for the attractions of his town, tried to persuade Wilkinson to give way. No player could well refuse such a potentate, though in possession of a license, and he consented. At rehearsal that day, the actors all waiting, Mr. Kemble came in. The Wednesday night came round, there was great excitement, and he played his part magnificently. Indeed, he graciously owned that he had never done it better in London. He was induced to play again on Friday to a very thin house; and on Saturday, when the little season closed, he took away with him a sum of one hundred and fifty pounds. All this is quite a little picture: the Lord Mayor, the assembly-rooms, the storm, and the small theatre. But there are many more graphic to be found in this manager's budget. The behaviour of Kemble is the least agreeable part

of the picture; and, considering their old relations, was certainly grasping. This was the weak place of both brother and sister; and after this we are scarcely surprised to hear that when the son of Mrs. Siddons asked his mother and uncle to play for him she agreed to do so on her favourite terms—half the receipts and a free benefit; while his uncle's answer was precisely to the same effect.

We may pass over one or two monotonous years, and then we find her, mindful of profit, hurrying again to Edinburgh, in the summer of the year 1788, starting from the house of her friends the Greatheads. But her triumphal course was disturbed by an unseemly "row" between an ambitious player, Mr. Fennell, who claimed to have been engaged to play with Mrs. Siddons, and the manager, Jackson. As is usual in a theatrical *émeute*, everything was sacrificed to party spirit and noise. Mr. Fennell had his followers, Mr. Jackson his; not a word could be heard; and Mrs. Siddons' performances were suspended a whole week while the battle was being fought out. At last the gentry, with much good sense, told the manager they would abandon him and his theatre for the future unless the dispute was settled. He then gave way. Nine weeks' acting

brought her in nine hundred pounds; and the Edinburgh barristers, imitating their brethren of Westminster Hall, presented her with a piece of plate and a silver tea-tray, bearing the conventional inscription.

But her recollections of the smaller country theatres could not have been agreeable. The elder Mathews was at that time engaged in the same company with her, and he described what she suffered from the barbarous frequenters of the Leeds galleries. When she was about to drink the poison, one called out, "Soop it oop, lass!" When she was playing the "sleeping scene" in *Macbeth*, a boy, who had been sent for some porter, walked on to the stage and presented it to her. In vain the great actress motioned him away; in vain hoarse voices called him off. The house roared; the whole play was spoiled. No wonder, when the curtain came down, on the last night of her engagement at Leeds, that she said, "Farewell, ye Brutes." The character of Tate Wilkinson is brought out with singular "roundness" and much graphic power.

During these seasons Kemble was patiently waiting, cautiously trying experiments in great parts, whose "rawness" he frankly acknowledged to his

friends, and content to look forward to the time when he could take his place without restraint or control. Everything was against him: the miserably incongruous dresses, which degraded a Shakspearian play; a stage-manager who had no control over the performers; and the inflexible rule before alluded to, which allowed old-established players a monopoly of leading characters. These, after all, were only the inconveniences of an admirable custom, so necessary to the perfection of the stage; and King, the manager, being one of the old school himself, was not likely to encourage its infringement. But we may pass over the chronicle of play succeeding play, and which makes some actors' lives about as tedious as an almanack. Leaving this dramatic catalogue to the laborious Mr. Geneste, who has compiled materials for the history of the English stage from the playbills of every night, we approach an important event in his life—his marriage.

Brereton, as one who knew him described him, was one of the handsomest young actors of his day, and had married the daughter of the prompter at Drury Lane. He was a tame, mediocre player, and had surprised his friends by acquiring a sudden fire and animation when playing with Mrs. Siddons in *Venice*

Preserved. In Mr. Boaden's mysterious language "it was said that in kindling his imagination the divinity unsettled his reason, but that in clasping the goddess he became sensible of the charms of the woman. Perhaps there was a slight foundation for the superstructure which inventive gossip ran up in haste at the time."

This cannot be pointed at Mrs. Siddons, and the behaviour of the gentleman during the time that the public attack was made upon her raises a presumption that he took that fashion of showing resentment, probably from finding his advances repelled. But scandal was to be too often busy with her name, and it was indeed one of the penalties of her high position. Her plain straightforward temper, her indifference to the finesse which more or less is always required in dealing with the public, exposed her to these stories.

In 1787 Brereton died in a lunatic asylum, leaving a widow, who had been Miss Priscilla Hopkins, daughter of a very respectable actress of Garrick's day, and who was still on the boards. It was a little difficult to conceive the stately Kemble, devoted to his profession and study, yielding himself to any romantic attachment; and indeed it would seem that

on previous occasions he had shown himself disposed not to allow any indulgence of his inclination to interfere with his substantial interests. The theatrical public had settled, and his devotion warranted their opinion, that he was to be married to Mrs. Inchbald, and later again, to Miss Philips; but he was then only commencing his career. The determination which marked everything connected with his professional life perhaps showed him that an early marriage would be a serious clog upon his exertions. His proposal to Mrs. Brereton, who had been a widow only nine months, we can see was guided by the same principle. His friend Boaden states that he could have without difficulty chosen from a rank higher than his own, and so handsome and cultivated a man, who, besides, claimed to be of a good family, might have found little difficulty in being accepted by some lady of position. The same friend explains that Kemble had calculated that a match of the kind would be ill-assorted and have inconveniences, whereas one of the same profession would bring sympathy and assistance with her. The news caused great astonishment and some amusement. It was told that the great actor signified his intention to the lady of his choice in a sort of royal fashion, telling her that she

would presently hear of a piece of good fortune that would surprise her.* It was no wonder that this rather abrupt proceeding gave occasion to stories, and one has gone the round of all the dramatic jest-books, where there is perhaps more unscrupulousness and falsehood to be found than in any other known miscellanies. It was said that a daughter of Lord North's had fallen in love with him, and that her father had offered to purchase, with a large sum, Kemble's immediate marriage, as an effectual cure. The malicious delighted to repeat that the nobleman had insolently declined to complete his part of the contract. A transaction so discreditable to both parties was improbable on the face of it; but to any one who knew the characters of both it seemed impossible. It is in truth only a variation of the legend that was told of Garrick and of Kean, by Dumas; and what will be probably always told of any handsome

* The lady consulted her mother on the meaning of this oracular allusion, which had been accompanied with a gracious "chuck under the chin" and the familiar name of "Pop." This was characteristic of Kemble, whose grim solemnity off the stage, testified to by many witnesses, verged on the grotesque. The experienced matron translated this into an impending proposal, and bade her daughter accept at once.

actor. And it is simply disposed of by Kemble's blunt and haughty declaration, on seeing it in print, that "it was *a lie!*" At the same time we may conceive that it was viewed a little in the nature of a *mésalliance.* The lady possessed only indifferent ability, and his union with some actress of conspicuous merit might have been looked for. But she was to prove an excellent wife, and made his home a very happy one.

The wedding-day was also to be a characteristic of Kemble. It was fixed for December 8th, 1787. After the marriage Mrs. Bannister asked the bridegroom where he proposed having the wedding-dinner, and was told that "he did not know; he supposed at home." Mrs. Bannister then invited the party to her house: an early dinner was got ready as the bride had to play that night at Drury Lane. Mr. Kemble, however, did not arrive at the hour fixed, and there was at last much alarm in the little party lest he should have forgotten the whole transaction. At last he was seen approaching in his most deliberate and stately manner. After the lady had repaired to the theatre, Kemble remained during the rest of the day with her family, until the play was over, when he fetched the bride home to his new house in

Caroline Street, Bedford Square.* The end of the season was to bring an improvement in his fortunes that was to help him to bear the additional charges of his new position; and after five years' service in the ranks he was now to be promoted to the position of manager of Drury Lane Theatre.

* She was born December 17, 1758, as her father, the well-known Drury Lane Prompter, told Mr. G. Dance, who again told Mr. Winston. She was *petite* in figure, and interesting in her style of acting. Brereton was not inclined to fulfil his engagement to her, and she had to follow him to Bath, where they were married, in 1777. They lived in Catherine Street, Strand. When Brereton was taken ill, Dr. Brocklesby declared him insane, and he was placed in an asylum at Hoxton, at a charge of about 100*l.* a year. In the year of his death his wife prayed for relief from the Drury Lane Theatrical Fund, as his affairs were in great embarrassment.—*Winston Papers.*

CHAPTER XIX.

KEMBLE MANAGER.

THE character of the chief proprietor of Drury Lane Theatre, his ingenious shiftiness, his dramatic self-extrication from difficulties, his reckless deficiency in all business qualifications, familiar to us through a hundred amusing stories, has really only the effect of increasing our wonder, and even admiration at the spectacle of such a man keeping a vast establishment from utter ruin and disorganization, the receipts of which at the door amounted to nearly sixty thousand pounds a year. It might be supposed that with the engrossing claims of politics, elections, and conviviality, the concern was only saved from ruin by his *neglect* of it; but, as will be seen presently, he always controlled it, and allowed his salaried-manager, who was supposed to be responsible, the smallest authority. Without the great actress, whom he had neglected, it may indeed be considered certain that the house would have gone to ruin; and this attraction,

his own plays and adaptations, the *Rivals*, *School for Scandal*, and *Pizarro*, with a few others almost as successful, helped this wonderful man, who enjoyed the luck that tides the clever spendthrift over many a crisis. The great difficulty for every one was to contrive to *see* the proprietor. He made endless appointments and never kept them; or arrived in a hurry, and was gone in a second, after fixing another day. He would arrive drunk, go into the green-room, and ask the name of a well-known actor who was on the stage, then bid them never allow him to play again. He was told, with some spirit, by one of the company, that he rarely came there, and then never but to find fault. Not yet had set in the season of hopeless difficulty at the theatre, when hardly one of the players, from the great Siddons herself to the leader of the band, could obtain money from him. Ingenious as were the pretexts for staving off payment, he had not yet reached the stage when such shifts pass the fine line which divides them from dishonesty. He was not yet to give the helpless widow of Strace a benefit, and then sweep off all the money taken at the doors.*

* This disgraceful act was told to Haydon the painter by Prince Hoare — an act almost too discreditable to be received; but

On King's shoulders was supposed to rest the responsibility of management; but he had long since found the position intolerable, for it was merely responsibility without power. He resigned it at the close of the year 1788, and when some of the newspapers declared that his removal could not be lamented, he rushed into their columns, and, to justify himself, threw amazing light on the disorder behind the scenes. After explaining his dependent situation in various ways, he declared he had not authority "to command the cleaning of a coat, or of adding, by way of decoration, a yard of copper lace, both of which it must be allowed *were often much wanted.*" This undignified revelation, as discreditable to him as to the theatre, seemed to point at much more; for the truth was, a manager could have no authority or influence over players whose salaries were overdue, or with difficulty extracted.

When Kemble was appointed to succeed King, it was at once stated that he had accepted office under the same restrictions, and *he* also must write to contradict such an assertion:—

I find that later Mrs. Siddons was complaining of the same dishonesty.

"I find myself arraigned," he wrote, "by an anonymous writer, as having undertaken the management of Drury Lane Theatre under *humiliating restrictions.* I do assure the writer and the public that no humiliation degrades my services to those who do me the honour to employ me, and that the power entrusted to me is perfectly satisfactory to my own feelings and entirely adequate to the liberal encouragement of poets, of performers, and to the conduct of the whole business of the theatre. The public approbation of my humble endeavours in the discharge of my duty will be the constant object of my ambition, and as far as diligence and assiduity are claims to merit, I trust I shall not be found deficient. I am happy to add, that I find myself most fairly and ably supported by the general zeal and exertions of a company of performers so capable of making the stage a source of pleasure and instruction. I am, with the greatest deference, the public's most obliged and humble servant, John Philip Kemble. Theatre Royal Drury Lane, October 10th, 1788."

Thus it was evident he had ample powers given to him, which were confirmed to him by his own greater strength of character, as compared with that of King; but this influence came to be presently

restricted in practice by Sheridan's difficulties and temper, and led to many disputes, and even quarrels.

That this change was most advantageous to the theatre could not be denied; for Kemble brought with him some sensible principles. The first, that plays should be decently mounted in regard to dress and scenery, both of which aids to effect had been disfigured by a scandalous squalor and incongruity; the second, a fairer distribution of characters, some of which were jealously retained by those who were too old to do them justice, with some abatement of the pretentious claims of the players, who would not condescend to lend their talents to any but leading characters. By this means, too, and by the retirement of one or two actors, the road was cleared for his talents, and he was enabled to take, as of right, some important and effective characters from which he had been excluded. Under his command there was now a good working company: counting the two Palmers, Bensley, Barrymore, Moody, Dodd, Suett, with his own sister, Miss Farren, Miss Pope, Mrs. Jordan, Mrs. Kemble, and Miss De Camp.* With

* It is hardly fanciful to say that there seems to be a certain

a company of such training and traditions much could be done, and though the new manager could not be considered very adroit in dealing with human nature, being too stiff and inflexible for delicate negotiation, yet in matters where a simple, straightforward course was desirable he showed no hesitation, and generally succeeded in his aims.

Being now fairly entitled to put himself forward in a whole round of leading parts, the public were to see him in Romeo, in the stormy Zanga, and Sciolto, and, what was bolder still, in a free range of comedy, trying such a gay and elegant character as Mirabel, and the less "airy" one of Leon or Lord Townly. All accounts, whether the deliberate criticisms of the time, or the recollections of friends, have this curious feature underlying abundant praises: they seem to be putting Kemble beside his own tragic self. That such a standard of comparison should be suggested shows that these performances could not have been wholly satisfactory. Later on we shall examine more particularly the value of his attempts in this direction,

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significance in the names of players. Moody, Dodd, Suett, Quick, Shuter, suggest fun and farce; Bensley has a sonorous and tragic ring, as has Macready, Kemble, Kean. This could be brought in aid of Mr. Shandy's theory of names.

which, at best, must have been "elocutionary" in the popular sense of the word. His figure and face and bearing must have been against him, and in the innumerable pictures of him, painted and engraved, as he touched middle life, may be noted a certain tendency to tragic "grimness," which is sometimes grotesque. This arose from that curious whisker, which was out of harmony with the fine classic contour of his face. At the same time it will be seen that in what may be called "grave comedy" he might excel. But almost every actor has believed, that if he could be indulged with perfectly fair conditions, he could show talent in both walks; and nearly every great actor has exhibited his powers in both, while it has become a jest of the profession how many a comic actor has believed that the true bent of his genius would be exhibited in deep tragedy.

But his grand effort was a spectacular revival—a sort of homage to *Macbeth*—the stage crowded with the singing witches, splendid scenery, and dresses, and he himself acting with his sister. For he was now in undisputed possession of the part, formerly being only allowed to take it as a compliment, and by the gracious allowance of the player to whom it belonged. It must be owned that he "illustrated"

Shakspeare after a principle that was utterly faulty, for he brought in the black, grey, and white spirits in bodily shape, as bands of little boys, in dresses of colours that corresponded to their names. One of the imps or elves was very troublesome to the manager, and was turned away in disgrace. This was a little boy whose name was Edmund Kean. But the real feature of the season which marks it as an era for the student of the drama, was the great revival of *Henry VIII.*, with Mrs. Siddons as Queen Katherine; which, like her Lady Macbeth, was to advance her yet another great step up the noble dramatic stair she was ascending, and affect her admirers with fresh feelings of admiration. Bensley was "in possession" of Wolsey; and Kemble, from delicacy to the veteran, did not claim the part, contenting himself with the characters of Cromwell and Griffith, which, in stage phrase, he "doubled." Such generous abnegation of self is often rewarded in great actors by the marked prominence into which they lift an inferior part. But by and by the departure of Bensley gave him the opportunity he wished for; and though he himself owned that his Wolsey at that time was "raw," the play became, as Mr. Boaden says, "one of the most attractive pieces ever known." The grandeur of the

actress as Queen Katherine, her air of suffering and persecution, enlisted a new order of sympathy, and the well-known denunciation of the Cardinal, like her famous scene in Macbeth, became inseparably associated with *herself*. As we read the play now, more than eighty years after that night, the tradition of the great actress is somehow sure to disturb the grander abstraction we ought to have before us. Later, at another theatre and under a different management, other members of the family strengthened the representation of the play; and in a curious picture, painted by Harlow, may be seen gathered nearly all the members of this remarkable family, the greatest in the centre.*

There was yet to be another revival which was to make this season famous—that of *Coriolanus*—a grand character that was to become identified with Kemble

* Nothing is more attractive or entertaining than a portfolio of good theatrical prints and portraits. The absence of such in our time proves the decay of the stage. For a successful theatrical scene or portrait, a dramatic play and a good character is necessary. Actors in those days exhibited character and story; but a scene from one of our modern plays, or the portrait of one of our modern players in character, would convey no idea. All that could be represented would be what we see in the illustrated newspapers of the day—the storming of a stage fort, the burning of a stage house, or some such startling incident.

himself, whose physical as well as mental gifts it suited to perfection. So completely penetrated did he become with the power and presence of this character, that from this epoch, it would seem to us, the bearing, speech, and the modes of thought of "the noble Roman" adhered to him, even in private life, and was accountable for much of that inappropriate formality and haughty stiffness which excited not a little amusement. These pieces were set off with great pageantry, processions, and "effects," and may be considered to be the first serious attempt at mounting Shakspeare's plays. It was this wonderful woman's art, as we have seen, to stamp some remarkable image of herself on the recollection, in great plays of this kind; and that fine actor, Young, looked back with admiration and wonder to the figure of her "Volumnia, as it lingered in his memory. "I remember her," he writes to Mr. Campbell, more than forty years after the performance, "coming down the stage, in 1789, in the triumphal entry of her son, Coriolanus, when her dumb-show drew plaudits that shook the building. She came alone, marching and beating time to the music; rolling (if that be not too strong a term to describe her motion) from side to side, swelling with

the triumph of her son. Such was the intoxication of joy which flashed from her eye, and lit up her whole face, that the effect was irresistible. She seemed to me to reap all the glory of that procession to herself. I could not take my eye from her. Coriolanus, banner, and pageant, all went for nothing to me, after she had walked to her place."

This exhausted the triumph of this remarkable season, and by two such excellent proofs of taste Kemble showed how fitted he was for the post to which he had been promoted.

It was no wonder that, with Mrs. Siddons' increasing success, her social prestige should also increase. So, too, did the number of her private friendships. Long after, when her life was not so happy, she would fondly recall how hardly a day passed without letters or visits from men like Reynolds, Erskine, Burke, or Sheridan. Neither had the favour of the Royal Family proved fitful; the King showed a sincere regard for her character, and her presence was officially recognised at the Palace as Reader to one of the young Princesses. He often expressed his wish to forward her interests and those of her family; though the characteristic frugality of that royal house made him accept her services

as instructress for his daughter gratuitously. It was on one of these visits to the Palace that a little incident occurred which showed her prudence and presence of mind. The King having come to talk to her, had then abruptly placed in her hand a sheet of paper inscribed with his signature, which was at the foot. She at once saw the explanation, and brought it to the Queen, who thanked her warmly for what was the first significant evidence of the malady which was then coming on him.* She behaved with good sense and discretion, and thus gave timely warning of what was to become a political as well as a private calamity. But when the King was restored to health we do not hear of any special mark of favour being bestowed on her. A theatrical celebration being given at Brookes's Club, she there came forward to recite some congratulatory verses on the Royal recovery, entitled

* She does not need any extravagant praise for so simple an action; neither should we call it "delicate and dignified," as her biographer does, assuming, it would seem, that another might have turned the gift to some profit. The value of the blank paper was no more than that of any royal autograph, and perpetual secresy as to the whole transaction would, after his recovery, have been the true "delicacy" that deserved praise.

"Britannia's Ode!" There was a want of delicacy in this proceeding; but to this sort of exhibition she was a little too prone; and the associations connected with this rubbish were wholly incongruous with those of her grand profession and stately gifts. Such recitations, monologues, &c., do not belong to the stage nor to artists at all, and should be left to "delineators" or reciters.* This performance at a club was undignified, even if it had been prompted by a desire to oblige the gentlemen who some years before had made up a purse for her.

Yet, though she must have brought great prosperity to the theatre, the eccentric proprietor did not think it worth his while to conciliate her. Through his relaxing hands money kept flowing as through a conduit-pipe, but he could not retain any for so valuable an auxiliary. She soon found it almost impossible to obtain her salary, nor did he care to redeem this neglect by any courtesy. One night—and Mr. Rogers used to tell the story as he heard it from her—when she was about to drive away from the theatre, Mr. Sheridan jumped into the carriage.

* She also "spouted" this "screed" at Drury Lane, and all round her circuit.

It is amusing, almost, to note the business-like way in which she confronted situations which might have made other ladies nervous. "Mr. Sheridan," she said, "*I trust that you will behave with propriety;* if not I shall have to call the footman to show you out of the carriage." She owned that he *did* behave himself. But as soon as the carriage stopped he leaped out and hurried away, as though wishing not to be seen with her. "Provoking wretch!" adds the lady. This little incident rather happily illustrates both their characters.

But she was at last to be fairly tired out by his treatment. Disgusted, it was said, at his shifts and pretences, she retired from the theatre at the close of her brother's first year's management. Sheridan coarsely as well as foolishly boasted that the theatre was so strong in comedy that it could do very well without her. Many speculations were set on foot as to the cause of this retirement. Mr. Campbell had it from "the best authority" that it was owing to the reason just given; but Mr. Boaden says that it was on account of a misunderstanding with her brother. This, in part, would seem probable. An actress of her position, with a brother in high authority, might expect many great privileges, and fairly assume that

he was no more than her deputy. No one would be so likely as Kemble to put aside coldly all claims of kindred, or to place duty to the theatre he directed above every other consideration. He would have almost taken a pride in putting her on the same just footing as the other players. It is probable, too, that the public were growing a little weary of the succession of lugubrious and tearful tragedies, and were turning, as Sheridan boasted, to comedy. A short absence —with actors a favourite tonic—would stimulate a jaded public taste; and, after passing by Bath and Birmingham, in the summer of 1790, she went over to France, leaving her two daughters at Calais. Great artists are always pleased with some unofficial act of homage.* Michael Kelly, the singer, drove up to the hotel at St. Omer just as Mrs. Siddons had departed—"*la grande actrice Anglaise*," as the landlady described her, who was critical as to her physical gifts; considering her, indeed, a fine woman, who was studying to imitate a French one, but "wanting a

* Mrs. Siddons must have been gratified with the Birmingham plaster-cast maker, who, without knowing his customer, showed her her own bust, with this praise, "That it was the likeness of the greatest and most beautiful actress in the world." She accepted the praise, but not the likeness; and this incident suggested to her the study of modelling, which became a favourite pursuit of hers.

great deal:" a characteristic bit of French vanity. The actress pursued her travels through the Netherlands, and her *compagnon de voyage* was Miss Wynne, later to be Lady Percival.

With the next season (that of 1790-91) prodigious efforts were made to induce her to return to Drury Lane. This was to be the last year of the old theatre's existence, and it was fitting that she should appear for a few nights at least. Her reception was indeed enthusiastic: the old house re-echoed for full five minutes to one sustained burst of shouting and clapping. But all remarked with much anxiety the change that had taken place in her. Her acting was as fine as ever, but there was a languor in her face which spoke of illness. Indeed, she could only play for a few nights, but her attraction was more powerful than before, and to see her Mrs. Beverley on one night over 400*l.* was paid by the public.

After that triumph she went on a visit to old friends to recruit her strength, and was then ordered to Harrogate to drink the waters. For this last season of "Old Drury" her brother prepared two more Shakspearian revivals—*Henry V.* and the *Tempest;* but must have made himself not a little absurd by attempting the character of Don Juan. The

spectacle of the stately Kemble lurking in porticos, scaling balconies, and twanging the guitar, after the conventional model of the stage Lothario, must have provoked many a smile. An event of more interest was to be the levelling of the venerable pile itself. It had been formally condemned by the architects, who pronounced that it had come to the stage when no patching or alteration could help it. This speaks rather indifferently for the architectural skill of the Brothers Adam, who not many years before had remodelled and thoroughly restored the house under Garrick's directions. Sheridan—yet another miracle in his career—went impetuously into the new plan, and forthwith issued proposals for debentures amounting to 150,000*l.*; which, more wonderful still, were taken up in a very short time. Yet the resources of the theatre were elastic enough to have borne this new burden and much more; and the value of the proprietors' shares, which had increased largely since Garrick had left, was a test of at least financial confidence. "I bought," wrote Sheridan, "of Mr. Garrick at the rate of 70,000*l.*; of Lacy, at 94,000*l.*; of Ford, at 86,000*l.*" But there was another device by which, at the fatal sacrifice of the very object for which the theatre was to be built, the new charge

was to be more than covered. For it was determined to construct a house of vast size which should hold enough additional people to pay the new class of renters. This programme was speedily worked into shape, and the last performance was given on June 4th, 1791, when the *Country Girl* was played, and the audience were dismissed with a simple announcement of its being the last night of performance. Yet an extraordinary interest ought to have attached to the occasion. It had been built by Wren, and had seen whole generations of the finest actors of the English stage—Betterton, Wilkes, Booth, and Garrick, exhibiting their talents under its roof; and its very shape and size were suited to the best display of voice and expression.

Sheridan was not a man to let any romantic interest stand in the way of pecuniary advantage, and we may suspect that the idea of increasing his gains by almost doubling the size of the house was the true reason for the rebuilding. A pleasant little skit, which came from the witty pen of Colman, commemorated the last hours of this fine old theatre.

"THE DEATH OF OLD DRURY.

"On Saturday night, of a *gradual decay*, and in the

117th year of her age, died *Old Madam Drury*, who existed through *six reigns*, and saw many generations pass in review before her. She remembered Betterton in his declining age; lived in intimacy with Wilkes, Booth, and Cibber; and knew *old Macklin* when he was a stripling. Her hospitality exceeded that of the English character even in its early days of festivity, having almost through the whole of her life entertained from *one to two thousand persons of both sexes*, six nights out of seven in the week. She was an excellent poetess—could be *grave* and *gay* by turns, and yet sometimes (catching the disorder from intrusive guests) could be *dull* enough in all conscience. Her *memory* was most excellent, and her *singing* kept on in such a gradual state of improvement that it was allowed her voice was better *the three or four last years* of her than when she was in her prime at the latter end of the last century. She had a *rout* of near two thousand people at her house the *very night of her death;* and the old lady found herself in such high spirits that she said she would give them 'No Supper' without a 'Song,' which being complied with, she fell gently back in her chair and *expired without a groan.* Dr. Palmer (one of her family physicians) attended her in her last moments, and announced her dissolution to the company."

With this old and classical structure passed away a host of reverent associations. There Johnson and Reynolds and Goldsmith had sat and criticized; there Garrick, a young man about town, had gone on as Harlequin; there Woffington had captivated all by her Sir Harry; there, in the front row of the pit, near the "spikes," had Churchill sat and taken notes for his "Rosciad;" there the greatest school of English actors had been formed, traditions of which, even at "third" hand, now make the excellence of any acting that is at all respectable. With its destruction and substitution of enormous houses it was to be discovered that the playing even of the Kembles was to lose half its charms; and though presently a crowd of small houses was to spring up, these, by scattering the actors, and by the necessary competition that arose, were to destroy the old traditions. More significant still was the social change to be brought about by the erection of great houses. As their vast size and burden of debt required a large return on the capital laid out, it was found necessary to attract the audience by means other than dramatic; hence were added those huge and dangerous "saloons," where loose company was encouraged and even invited, in the hope of securing the attendance of the bloods and bucks of the town. With the saloons came the

"private boxes," which, again, were foreign to the nature of a purely dramatic entertainment; the object of the "privacy" being that the tenants might converse or amuse themselves, secure from the observation of the audience, or without being obliged to attend to what was going on upon the stage. It is not a far-fetched notion to attribute much of the present decay to this material alteration in the conditions of the audience. In the old Drury Lane, the first row of boxes were all open, and the ladies and gentlemen were expected to appear in full dress, such as they wore at a rout or party. The green boxes over head were given up to the citizens, their wives, and daughters; while the lattices at the top of all were the only portion open to those whose position was doubtful, and whose conversation or behaviour could be no interruption to the business of the stage. Now, it is impossible to deny that the spectacle of a house all "open," with all the figures of the spectators visible, must have had great influence and encouragement for the actors. We might even trace back to this introduction of saloons, private boxes, &c., the present indecent disorder that reigns in everything dramatic, when playhouses have become mere booths for the exhibition of showy women, mechanical ap-

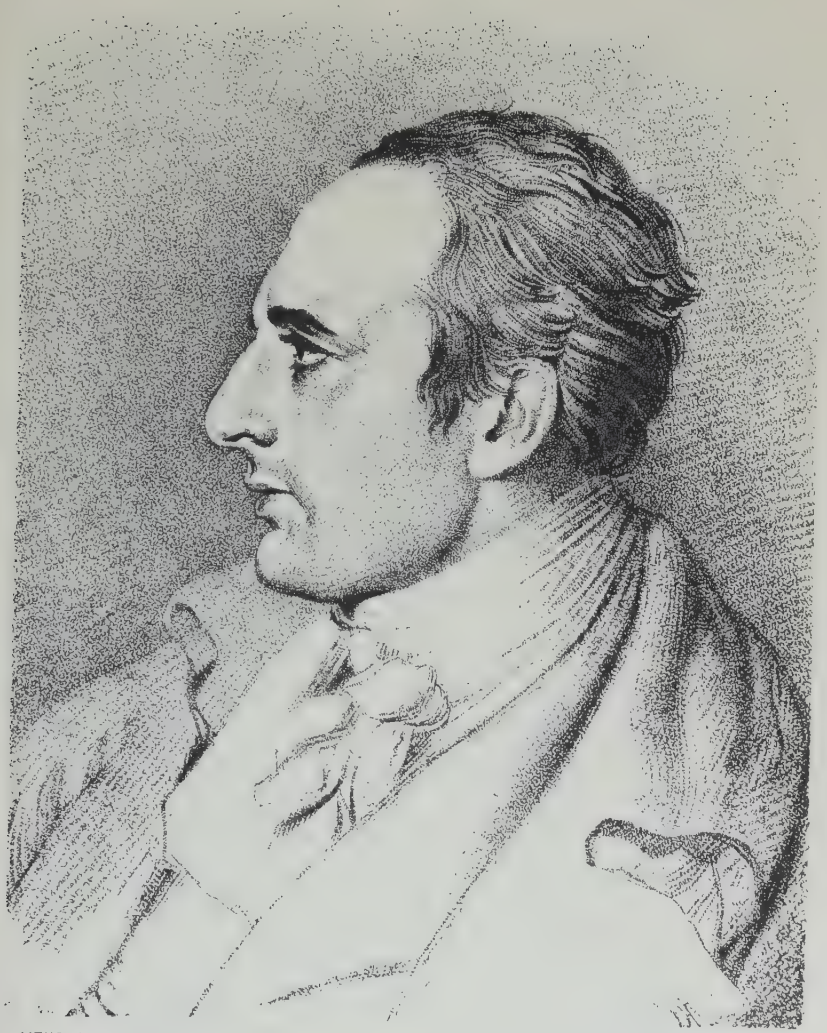
paratus, dancing, and buffoonery. All this dates from the time when a theatre became a mere trading speculation, and exposed to all the incidents of a trading speculation—viz., to competition or failure. And hence might be drawn very strong arguments for the maintaining of a strict licensing or "patent" system; for there can be no question but that this free unrestrained gathering in of crowds to witness unprofitable shows has an enormous influence on morals, and should be as much matter of regulation as the gathering in taverns and public-houses. This overdone system of mere houses of exhibition might surely be regulated on the same principle as the supply of public-houses—viz., by their proportion to the population of a district.

It will thus be seen how much more appropriately a dirge might have been sung over the demise of a good school of acting, which was to disappear with the destruction of the walls within which an audience could see and hear.

CHAPTER XX.

SHERIDAN AND "NEW DRURY LANE."

ALREADY Kemble was finding his position as manager, though fortified with the most favourable stipulations, anything but easy. In practice, Sheridan was not in the habit of allowing himself to be constrained by the fetters of an engagement; and from the sheer impossibility of carrying out the plans he had arranged, Kemble began to find his position most embarrassing. This may have added an irritability to a character that was habitually grave and reserved, and made him ready to accept from the discontented even the arbitration of the pistol, when it was proposed to him. One of the Aickens—"brethren in mediocrity," as Lamb called them—was studiously rude to him at table; and after much forbearance, Kemble resented this treatment and agreed to give the offender what was then called "satisfaction." The two actors met outside Marylebone, attended by old Bannister, when Kemble



LITHO. PHOTOGRAPHIC INST

492, NEW OXFORD STREET

J. P. Kemble

coolly received his adversary's fire, and declined to return it. The histrionic dignity that sat so well on him at the footlights always attended him off the stage. He had already fought Mr. Daly, the Irish manager, and in fact was "called out" in his life no less than four times. But there was more dignity, as well as morality, in his rebuke to a foolish play-writer, who was connected with the aristocracy—the Hon. Mr. St. John—who had written one of the innumerable "Mary Queen of Scots" plays, and was impertinent to the manager in the green-room. High words followed. "You are a person I cannot call out," said Mr. St. John, insolently. "*But you are a person I can turn out!*" was the ready reply; "and you shall leave this place at once." The offender had the good sense to return and offer his apologies. It must be admitted that there was gathering about Kemble at this time the buckram-like coils of a pedantic solemnity, which invited ridicule, and made those who differed from him impatient. It must be said there was excuse for Sheridan's irregularity, if his subordinate could take so grotesque a fashion of remonstrating as Mr. Boaden witnessed one evening. Smarting under a sense of contempt or neglect—particularly at the fashion in which his

authority was set at defiance, and others below him were encouraged to do so—he found himself one night at Mrs. Crouch's, that fascinating singer of whom our fathers used to rave, and who gave little supper-parties after the play was over. On this evening Kemble arrived charged with his grievances, expecting to meet Sheridan there, as soon as the house was up, "and in a sort of inarticulate murmur alarmed the party with the prospect of a scene." Sheridan presently came in, sat down by Mrs. Crouch, and looked over at Kemble with kindness; "but the kindness was neither returned nor acknowledged. The great actor now looked unutterable things, and occasionally emitted a humming sound like that of a bee, and groaned in spirit inwardly. . . . . A considerable time elapsed, and frequent repetitions of the sound before-mentioned occurred; when at last, 'like a pillar of state,' slowly uprose Kemble, and in these words addressed the astonished proprietor:—'I am an eagle, whose wings have been bound down by frosts and snows, but now I shake my pinions and cleave into the genial air unto which I am born.' He then deliberately resumed his seat." There was something absolutely ridiculous in this fashion of announcing a resignation; but Sheridan, with all the

art of which he was master, came and soothed him, and at an early hour of the morning both went away together in perfect harmony.

Indeed, anecdotes of Kemble in this humour could be multiplied, and are exceedingly diverting. They contain the elements of humour, because of the contrast between his genuine seriousness and the grotesqueness of the situation. Of this class was the story told to Moore by Murray, the Edinburgh manager. When Kemble was playing Coriolanus, a raw actor forgot his part at the passage—

> "For that he . . . .
> Has envied against the people, seeking means
> To pluck away their power."

And after staring at Kemble, substituted, "And that *he is always going about the streets*, making every one uncomfortable." After the play the fellow apologized. But the great actor looked at him with ineffable scorn, and merely exclaimed, "Beast!" So, too, on his passage into Drury Lane Theatre, and his being saluted by the Guardsmen on duty in military fashion, which pleased him so much, that he addressed them in a Shakspearian speech, and gave them a guinea to drink. His encouragement to the supernumerary, with a good Roman head and bearing, but

who was a little awkward, was more characteristic: "They *like* you!" and presently he added, "They like me!" thus flattering the man by this unexpected companionship.

The truth was, Kemble had the profoundest admiration for his clever friend. He knew nothing of politics, and scarcely ever looked into a newspaper; but any allusion to the subject of Sheridan was certain to make him break out in raptures over his hero. At the same time, the sense of the treatment he had met with from the "god of his idolatry" threw him into an amusing conflict. "I know him thoroughly," he would say, angrily—"all his paltry tricks and artifices;" then he would threaten to join a political society, "the Friends of the People," and go there to expose him. The supper-scene might be accepted as exaggeration, except that we have it from an eye-witness and intimate friend. No lover of true stage art can deal very severely with this almost regal solemnity of Kemble's, imported into private life, though he may smile at it; for it shows that his profession was always before his eyes, and filling his thoughts, even in his cups. It is a more pardonable weakness than the failing of our day, when every player would forget his profession if he could.

While the new theatre was being built the company had moved to the great Opera House, taking with them all the scenery and properties of Drury Lane, which were a world too small for that vast area. The great breadth of the stage was intended to display the vast forces of chorus and ballet to the best advantage; and the "auditorium," as it is now called, was of extraordinary height and spaciousness. This change of conditions was already found to operate on the Drury Lane players in a most fatal way, and, to their own surprise, they now discovered that their expression either of voice or feature quite failed to produce the old effect. Here was a significant warning for those who were planning the new and ambitious temple, but Sheridan was only thinking of how he should best *exploiter* the enterprise and make it serve for the most *profitable* ends. This intermediate state of things which continued as the walls of the new theatre were rising proved unsatisfactory in every view. The prices were raised. The simple attraction of good acting was insufficient to fill so huge a house, where all that makes up good acting could not be appreciated, or indeed be intelligible; and the performances at the Opera House were considered to have added substantially to Sheridan's later embarrassments.

We may pass over this interval, which was only marked by Kemble's success in a new direction—viz., in the first of a series of melodramatic characters of a lower but more popular order than what he had hitherto attempted—viz., Octavian in *The Mountaineers* of Colman. He also ventured to play Marlow, one of the most delightful characters in comedy for piquancy, gaiety, and originality. This rash venture was a suitable pendant for his inconsiderate attempt to represent Charles Surface, it being hard to determine for which he was most unfitted. But the theatre was now nearly completed, and with its completion, as will be seen, came new influences which were to affect not only the playing of the great actress herself, but the whole interests of the drama.

On April 21st, 1794, the new house was opened for the drama. The architect was Holland, who had recently remodelled Covent Garden Theatre. For vastness of size, at least, it was considered almost the finest theatre in Europe. There was a surprising lightness and airiness about the interior, though the malicious likened it to a great birdcage, owing to the fashion in which the dividing lines of the boxes converged at the centre of the ceiling. Everything in the interior construction was on an ambitious scale.

There were tiers upon tiers of boxes, with great galleries and a spacious amphitheatre near the roof, all arranged with a novel solidity of construction. Its scenery was ambitious, artistic and elaborate, and the dresses all new. It held close upon four thousand spectators, and a night's receipt was calculated at about 800*l.* Garrick's old theatre, on a crush, barely held two thousand persons, and its receipt could hardly be stretched to 400*l.* This might be thought satisfactory, but such advantages were dearly purchased by the certain destruction of fine acting and proscription of fine dramas. For on this occasion was inaugurated the fatal principle which has obtained ever since: *that the performers and the performance must be made to suit the theatre,* while the theatre itself must be made to suit speculation; and the example being set by two great houses dividing a monopoly, the blow fell with double effect.

Looking at a picture of Garrick's Drury Lane Theatre, we at once see on what principles he laid out his interior. The two rows of boxes were rather open galleries than boxes, and the amphitheatre, or two-shilling gallery, was brought boldly down into the centre of the second row of boxes. He knew how to value the encouragement of these trusty supporters;

for the rude but intelligent appreciation of a vast mass of human beings, who could see and hear and understand what was going on, unfettered by the conventional restraints of fashion, was most valuable to the actors, in imparting spirit to the performance. Every whisper, every glance could be understood in those regions, and this feeling influenced the finest exertions of the players. In the old theatre, too, the arrangement that brought the stage-doors and the foremost "wings" well forward into the house, was most advantageous for the "exit" of the actor, giving him scope for some of the finest bits of playing, for what was called "springing off with a glance at the pit," by which defiant and hateful villains could retire from view with true dramatic force; whereas the greater space to be travelled over under the new arrangement obliged them to have recourse to stage artifices to sustain the effect. In the new houses the gallery audience was sent away aloft, and put far back, where they had, at most, but distant glimpses, and could hear nothing that was not declaimed loudly. But their position was favourable compared to what it was to be later. In the other parts of the houses many could neither see nor hear without exertion, and they also exhibited a new and objectionable feature, bor-

rowed from abroad—the introduction of vast numbers of private boxes, by which the profits were to be largely increased, an abuse which the public were later to resent in a riot that has become historical. But it will be seen presently how these mere material conditions began at once to operate on the Drama, and, of necessity, even on the classic judgment of Kemble himself.

Macbeth was selected for this inauguration, but a rather absurd exhibition preceded the performance. To reassure the audience against all fears of fire, a huge iron curtain was let down and ostentatiously struck with a hammer. When this screen was raised, a lake of real water was discovered, with a cascade tumbling down; while Miss Farren was put forward to deliver a boastful and imprudent challenge to the powers of fire—

> "The very ravages of fire we scout,
> For we have herewithal to put it out:
> In ample reservoirs our firm reliance,
> Whose streams set conflagrations at defiance."

A defiance that was taken up only too soon. The great audience was delighted. Enormous exertions had been made to set off Shakspeare's play; even the great actress herself had grown excited by the pre-

parations to do honour to Shakspeare, and wrote to her friend Lady Harcourt,—"I am told that the banquet is a thing to go and see of itself. The scenes and dresses all new, and as superb and characteristic as it is possible to make them. You cannot conceive what I feel at the prospect of playing there. I dare say I shall be so nervous as scarcely to be able to make myself heard in the first scene." This short and enthusiastic note positively contains an epitome of the decay of the stage. "I am told that the banquet *is a thing to go and see of itself.*" Up to this day such a sentiment had never been heard; people might go to see a Garrick and Pritchard, or Siddons and Kemble, in Macbeth and Lady Macbeth; but no stage manager had yet dreamed of elaborating "a banquet-scene," the cups, meats, and guests, &c., so as to make it a marked feature. The hint was not lost, and it was reserved for Mr. Charles Kean cumbrously to overlay the great dramatist of England with gold and silver and decoration, and in every play that he revived carry out the principle of "the banquet-scene being a thing to go and see of itself." The actress was afraid she might not make herself heard from "nervousness," but she was presently to find that this was to be the least of all hindrances to

her producing effect. Almost on the first night she must have discovered that her powers were subjected to altogether new conditions; and though she had already played at the Opera House, it was after a sort of provisional fashion. Soon a change in her style was noticed: her acting became "larger" and coarser, to aid distant effects; her gestures and *poses* became bolder and more theatrical, and of course less spontaneous. There was to be a long farewell to those delicate graces, to those electrical changes of expression, now to be lost, in a great measure, on the bulk of the audience.

Sir Walter Scott* recalled this house and its later appearance, when it was often half empty, as a huge "Dom-Daniel"—for this was incident to temples of this great size, that some great attraction was always necessary to bring nearly four thousand people together. And it is certainly not a little curious to contrast a later declaration of Mrs. Siddons, made after due experience, with her pleasant anticipation written to Lady Harcourt. Dowton used to tell how she said to him—"I am glad to see you at Drury

* In his agreeable paper on Kemble, contributed to the *Quarterly Review*.

Lane, but you are come to act in a wilderness of a place, and God knows, if I had not made my reputation in a small theatre, I never should have done it." Like her, all the actors had to strain their voice, and found they could obtain no applause, nor indeed be understood, unless they indulged in some exaggeration of voice and gesture—separated by only a fine line from *rant*. To dwell so long on the opening of a theatre—a matter that now takes place once or twice every year—will be excused, as the reader will see how curiously this event has been bound up with the fortunes of the Drama.

This occasion was of special interest to the family, as it brought forward, for the first time, in the character of Malcolm, Charles Kemble, an interesting young actor, who in a certain line of parts was to acquire great reputation. As we have seen, he had been sent to Douai, but news coming home that he was dangerously sick, his brother John had set out on a journey to join him. By quite a dramatic surprise, their chaises met on the Dover Road, Charles having recovered and started for England. No wonder that this strong family connexion at the one theatre led to remarks, and it was concluded that very soon the family would acquire a substantial

interest in the property they had such a share in sustaining. But what attracted most criticism was the strange and un-Shakspearean novelty of leaving the presence of Banquo's ghost to be signified solely by the agitation and horror of the actor. This was surely an indiscretion, one of those unaccountable blunders into which an excess of study sometimes betrayed Kemble. For the obvious effect would be that the audience would adopt the guests' opinion, and suppose that Macbeth was labouring under some hallucination, instead of seeing the ghost of Banquo. But this was fellow to that other absurdity of representing the "spirits" by boys dressed in different colours. But this specimen of "realistic" treatment was only too significant of what was to come.

For almost at once the great theatre began to create a spectacular class of entertainment, which would draw the great herd of sightseers, always larger than the more cultivated class to whom purely intellectual art would be attractive. In taking this step Kemble, like his predecessor, Garrick, felt that his responsibility to the theatre did not allow him to make costly sacrifices in the cause of legitimacy, and boldly arranged one of the earliest of the dashing fighting melodramas, entitled *Lodoiska*. He

had a good ballet-master—D'Egville—who could dispose spirited groups, suited to the size of the stage; while every night a Tartar fortress was stormed and set on fire, and a terrific battle fought—all with much profit to the house. This was introducing a fresh attraction, and from this stock descends a whole line of stirring shows, in which robbers herd in caves underneath castles, millers issue forth, or use their mills for the same ends, armies advance and retreat. *Timour the Tartar*, still familiar, *Tekeli, or the Siege of Montgatz*, *The Miller and his Men*, *Pizarro*, and a host of such pieces, were all of a kin, and unquestionably owed their origin to the large theatres. For what was now wanting was something more or less independent of dialogue or character—an exciting story which could be told to the eye by the aid of rich dresses, processions, combats, and incidents, like the blowing up of a bridge or mill. *Lodoiska* and *Timour the Tartar* are so exceedingly primitive in their composition as to seem grotesque now, and the latter, at least, has found its way to the circus. *The Miller and his Men* and later pieces are a prodigious advance upon such rude attempts, and were fashioned by skilful hands.

During this season Mrs. Siddons' health was still

indifferent. Her daughter Cecilia was born the same year, on July 25th, 1794.

"I have the pleasure to tell you," wrote her husband to a friend, "your little god-daughter (for such she is, myself being your proxy a few days back) is very well, and as fine a girl as if her father was not more than one-and-twenty. She is named after Mrs. Piozzi's youngest daughter, Cecilia; her sponsors are yourself and Mr. Greathead, Mrs. Piozzi and Lady Percival (*ci-devant* Miss B. Wynn); and, what is better, the mother is well too, and is just going to the theatre to perform Mrs. Beverley, for the benefit of her brother's wife, Mrs. Stephen Kemble."

Her mother went to Margate to recruit her health in September, and from this time we can see developing what was always a feature in her disposition, a sort of despondency and dissatisfaction with the world. The popular idea of the great queen of tragedy would be of course that of a soul delighting in—living in—the applause of the public; but it is certain that no one's heart ever turned so wistfully to her family and fireside.

"My whole family are gone to Margate," she wrote in September, "whither I am going also; and nothing would make it tolerable to me, but that my

husband and daughters are delighted with the prospect before them. I wish they could go and enjoy themselves there, and leave me the comfort and pleasure of remaining in my own convenient house, and taking care of my baby. But I am every day more and more convinced that half the world live for themselves, and the other half for the comfort of the former. At least, this I am sure of, that I have had no will of my own since I remember; and, indeed, to be just, I fancy I should have little delight in so selfish an existence."

Yet with this ill-health and depression she was getting ready for a tour in the north, to be marked by perhaps the hardest work she had yet gone through. Again had the paragraph-mongers been at work, and a fresh cabal been formed: no one indeed was ever so harassed. Such continued persecution of a woman was really unworthy. She was on the eve of setting out for Edinburgh, to play at her son Henry's theatre, and a letter she wrote to her dear friend Whalley shows how much she was affected by anxiety and persecution: "I intend, if it please God, to be at home again for Passion week. I leave my sweet girl behind me, not daring to take her so far north this inclement season, and could well wish

that the interests of the best of sons and most amiable of men did not so imperiously call me out of this softer climate just now. But I shall pack myself up as warmly as I can, trusting that while I run a little risk I shall do a great deal of good to my dear Harry, who tells me all my friends are more eager to see me than ever.

"It is not possible that I may stop a night or two here before I go, which, as I have long been engaged to act this season, after Easter, and cannot in honour or honesty be off, I think will not be impolitic, lest my enemies, if their malignity be worth a thought, may think their impotent attempts have frightened me away. They have done all their malignant treachery could devise, and have they robbed me of one friend? No, God be praised! but, on the contrary, have knit them all closer to me. *Glad enough should I be never to appear again;* but while the interests of those so dear and near as those of son and brother are concerned, one must not let selfish considerations stand in the way of Christian duties and natural affection."

This seems to refer to a scandalous libel which had appeared on her character, and for the discovery of whose author her husband offered 1000*l.* reward. But

by this time she ought surely to have been case-hardened to such attacks.

The sister was certainly to be pitied in being exposed to stories of this kind; but the brother was to give the town cause for scandal by a most unfortunate escapade. One morning the papers contained the following extraordinary communication from him:—

"I, JOHN PHILIP KEMBLE, of the Theatre Royal, Drury Lane, do adopt this method of publicly apologizing to Miss De Camp, for the very improper and unjustifiable behaviour I was lately guilty of towards her, which I do further declare her conduct and character had in no instance authorized; but, on the contrary, I do know and believe both to be irreproachable.

"Jany. 7, 1795."

This was read with astonishment, and was so obscure as to give rise to all kinds of surmises. The truth was believed to be that the great actor had indulged in wine, which, at one time, as Scott says, he used to take "in pailfuls;" and under this influence had burst into the young lady's dressing-room. The only extenuation to be offered for such outrageous behaviour is the handsome character of the apology, which, from its phrasing, we may conclude was volunteered by Kemble. One would readily wish to pass over this unpleasant transaction, which is the sole instance of indecorum in his irreproachable life; but

the matter was too notorious to be thus dismissed. It is ludicrous to find the champion of Miss Phillips, in presence of such an intrusion, himself offending in the same gross way; and the surprising part of the transaction is, that it should have been condoned by the public so readily. But the *amende* would have been considered by Talleyrand a blunder worse than the offence itself; and a judicious friend, even of the lady, would have strongly dissuaded a public reparation which could only excite curiosity. To make the matter yet more perplexed, the lady not long after became his sister-in-law.

On this expedition Mrs. Siddons travelled nine hundred miles without a companion, and made a great deal of money. In addition to her anxieties about her daughters, her husband was now falling into bad health, and was obliged to live at Bath, on account of rheumatism and other infirmities. At Birmingham she seems to have played with all her accustomed spirit, and have enraptured her audiences:—"*The dejecting nature of my bodily sensations,*" wrote the high-flown Anne Seward, "counteracted the longings of my spirit after those sublime representations of high-strung feelings and conflicting passions, till I saw Mrs. Siddons announced for Hermione, and

Catherine the Shrew. I could then resist no longer, much as I feared the exertion. She was, if possible, greater than ever, and I was very glad to observe her plumpness and healthier looks since I saw her in Lady Macbeth this time three years. She sent *me a thrice-kind billet* after the first act: a more welcome one I have seldom received, for I love, as well as admire her infinitely. I called at her door next morn, but it was the day of her leaving Birmingham, which made it impossible she could have leisure to see any person: so I left my billet of acknowledgment for her gratifying notice. On leaving the stage, after her general curtsey, she made one to me *with a smile of benignity*, which is engraved on my heart. O, Mr. Whalley, what an enchanting Beatrice she is!"

There are many agreeable little pictures in her provincial travels, and none more graphic than one drawn by Miss Burney, of the little Weymouth Theatre, when the King and Royal Family were stopping there. It falls into this place, though it is somewhat later in date. The author of *Evelina* tells how she met the stately actress walking on the sands with her children, and received an obeisance as stately; how the aged King commanded a performance at the theatre, and the Royal Family being away

on an expedition, kept the packed audience waiting. How the farce was put first; and how the King and Queen arriving at last, they sent a page home for their wigs, so as not to detain the audience further. These little sketches are very graphic and pleasant, and light up the dull round of the player's life.

CHAPTER XXI.

THE GERMAN DRAMA.

THE health of Kemble himself was not good; and indeed his labours of playing and management combined must have told on even a stronger constitution. He was unwearied in directing the business, and all the great processions, "antiquarianism," and general pageantry, which made the chief attraction of Drury Lane, were arranged by him personally. A man so devoted to the study of the text of his author was likely to be quite as deep a student of all that could illustrate that text; and it was as much the leanings of his own mind, joined with the inviting capacity of the new theatres, that brought him the reputation of being the first that introduced on an important scale what may be called "archæological revivals." Kemble, Charles Kemble, Macready, and Charles Kean, are the four names associated with this undramatic pedantry, which transfers the discussions of the Society of Antiquaries to the boards

R. Hamble

believe me
my dear Colin Mitchell

I have no objection to your proposal

truly yours
R. Hamble

I hope Mrs Cooper is better to day

I am dear
Your most obed
Wm A. F Cam

of a theatre. What dry principles were at work in Kemble's mind will be seen from the directions given to his manager, in reference to the production of some showy procession. "I send you," he wrote from Liverpool, in 1789, "the first sheet of my historical procession for the pantomime. I have taken some pains to make it clear in every particular, and I hope they are not thrown away.

"The banners *Anglo-Saxon, Dane, Saxon Line Restored,* and *Norman* should be very large; and the words upon them in silver, as that will be seen better, I think, than gold; these banners I call *generical.* They must all be of different form. The banners Rollo, Plantagenet, York, Tudor, Stuart, and Brunswick should be smaller; these banners I call *specific,* and let all be of a very beautiful form, and very richly ornamented.

"The banners on which are inscribed the names of the kings, as 'Alfred the Great, Founder of the British Monarchy, 872–901,' 'Edward the Elder,' &c., should be all of one shape; let them be round, the ground black, the inscriptions gold, with rich borders, &c. Making these uniform, the names of the kings and the dates of their reigns will be more easily distinguished from the other banners. These I call regal banners.

"The banner inscribed, 'It is just the English should be ever free as their own thoughts,' must be a silver ground with a gold inscription. Mr. Greenwood will dispose the words in lines, to look as handsome as he can devise. The other banners, as 'Wittenagemote,' 'Common Law,' 'Trial by Jury,' 'University of Oxford,' which I call miscellaneous banners, should not be of two shapes in the same reign."* With much more of the same kind.

Many years later, when Charles Kemble was busy with some pretentious revivals, old medals and inscriptions were diligently consulted; and the lengths to which the decoration of Shakspeare was carried by the late Charles Kean, amounted to an abuse. The truth is, all this minute reproduction of costume, and inscriptions, furniture, &c., of a very remote age, the accuracy of which is besides doubtful, or based on speculation, is misplaced on the stage. It should be always remembered that the whole interest of stage enjoyment is found in character and mental action; the rest—scenery, decoration, dresses, &c., should be, as it were, sufficiently "indicated,"—so far as not to have anything discordant. Charles Lamb protested

* These letters are given in Bannister's Life.

justly, that the mere placing of a character like Lear upon the stage, made a soul that was almost infinite in its grandeur and sublimity, earthly and mean; and on the same principle a too great realism in scenery and dresses, levels the dignity of the drama to the prosy measure of every-day life. But there is a further objection. The fantastic discoveries of archæological science, the odd and eccentric types of costume and furniture, which are guessed at and spelt out of illuminated MSS. and medals, are all unfamiliar, and though possibly correct, were not present even to those who wrote the plays thus illustrated. They are less present to the mind of the audience. There is besides no guarantee that there have not been mistakes in the treatment and manipulation of what might have been right in the main. There are certain conventional types of costume and illustration to which an audience is accustomed, and which indicate *sufficiently* the era to which the piece belongs; and this is all that is required, all that will harmonize with the grand object of interest, the progress of character, and the action of the drama. Go beyond this, and we shall have to employ an army of builders, carpenters, furniture-makers, upholsterers, &c., who will have almost to work at their trades

between the acts. The realism of scenery, departing from the natural principle of "indication," has led to an extravagance that will be content with nothing less than a literal reproduction of the object itself in all its entirety. If a crowd or an army is to be introduced, nothing will suffice but a crowd or an army almost as vast as a real one. When the books of the Camden Society or the Calendars of State Papers are to be studied to set off a drama, the result will be thrown away on the persons who are legitimately thinking of the play, and only the stray antiquary will truly appreciate such labour.*

Following the public taste, instead of judiciously guiding it, Kemble had noted symptoms of a leaning towards a morbid foreign colouring; and Godwin's gloomily powerful story of *Caleb Williams* being then popular, Colman wrote a drama on the subject which could hardly be called an adaptation, the subject being treated with much freedom. For this he was to receive an unusually large sum—viz., 1000*l.* It received the melodramatic title of the *Iron Chest*, and

* I may be pardoned for referring the reader to a work of my own, "The Principles of Comedy and Dramatic Effect," where this interesting and important question will be found treated at much greater length.

for tempestuous rage and frantic frenzy the hero, Sir Edward Mortimer, offered opportunity to an inferior actor for as grotesque an exhibition as would be Sir Giles Overreach under similar conditions. It may be stated that the play was a complete failure, that the author was furious, and in a highly personal advertisement charged the manager, who played the chief character, with purposely contriving this result.* Kemble was suffering from illness at the time, and this excuse, with the indifferent character of the piece, was considered by his friends sufficient to support this view, and most theatrical writers have been inclined to join in the verdict; but Kemble cannot be acquitted altogether.

With this piece is connected an episode highly characteristic of Kemble, when in that strange and lofty mood which frequently settled on him. The play, too, marks a sort of era in Kemble's

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* As will be gathered from the characteristic preface to the play, which is really unique. Even the formal cast of the characters begins in this fashion :—

"Sir Edward Mortimer . . . . . Mr. Kemble!!!"

and the motto was—

"I had as lief the town-crier spoke my lines."

humour. He was beginning to exhibit some of that haughty and regal deportment which raised up some enemies, and excited not a little amusement in those whom it did not touch. The play was, it seems, put into rehearsal as fast as the scenes were written, an experiment which might be risked with a genius like Sheridan, but which in the case of Colman the younger, who had not then won the reputation he subsequently enjoyed, was hazardous. Every incident connected with the production of the play was unfortunate. The author was confined to his bed by a cold caught "under the damp dome" of the great theatre; the composer, Storace, was seized with an illness from the same cause, from which he never recovered; while Kemble, who was to play the chief character, was so ill that he could only appear three days before the play was performed. There had been no regular rehearsal, and it certainly seemed not only necessary, but just to both author and public, that a play should not be brought forward with such imperfect preparation. Kemble peremptorily decided that it was to be played. Perhaps he considered that the author's absence from rehearsals was to be punished. Only three hours before the curtain rose a message was brought to Colman, still in bed, that

the difficulty of "setting" an abbey scene in proper time would require the order of two scenes to be transposed. As this would naturally be done at a sacrifice of sense and coherency, the alarmed writer rose and hurried down to the theatre. He found the stately actor 'taking opium pills,' a medicine, however, which he was in the habit of using. What followed was really amusing. The play began. The first scenes were intolerably long, and there was some disapprobation. The next followed, which was to redeem it. "Well," says Colman, "the great actor was discovered as Sir Edward Mortimer, in his library. Gloom and desolation sat upon his brow, and he was habited, from the wig to the shoestring, with the most studied exactness." But in a few moments the state of the case became apparent. The part was indeed a gloomily ferocious one, but from the first sentence Kemble settled himself resolutely down into a steady, solemn demi-chant, never rising or falling, inspiring every one with an overpowering weariness and dejection. In ten minutes the whole house was yawning or asleep. At the end of the first act the luckless author, in despair, came to implore that an apology should be made on the ground of the actor's illness. This was haughtily refused. "It should have been

made at the beginning of the piece." Then why had it *not* been made? Because he had hoped to get the better of his indisposition. "Besides, it was quite *evident to the audience.* He had coughed very much upon the stage, and an apology would *only make him look like a fool.*" But through the interference of one of the proprietors, he was induced to permit this step to be taken, and the play again staggered on. "The piece was now one-third over," says Colman, "and I made up my mind, like an unfortunate traveller, to pursue my painful journey through two stages more upon a broken-down poster, on whose back lay all the baggage for my expedition. Miserably did the poster proceed; he groaned, he lagged, he coughed, he wheezed." The audience, wearied out by this steady and unvarying "ponderosity," grew discontented. The actor "plodded on," seemingly careless of their disapprobation. But at last he came forward. "He feared *he* was the cause of this disapprobation, but hoped he would gain strength on a future occasion to do justice to the merits of the play." This "grand generosity and ostentatious humility" only made the author more furious, and prompted him to write that hostile preface, which is amusing for its graphic personality. He borrowed a metaphor from racing,

where a horse, he says, sometimes walks over the course, the only difference being that in such a case the horse wins money for his employer. "Jockeys, too, had a well-known trick, which was then called 'playing booty,' but in our day bears the name of 'pulling,' appearing to use their utmost efforts to come in first, but determined to come in last. The consequence is that all except the knowing ones attribute no fault to the jockey, but damn the horse as a sluggard. Mr. Kemble chiefly chose to be the horse. Every now and then, but scarcely enough to save appearances, he gave a slight touch of the jockey, and *played booty!*" This was passing beyond all decent bounds. The play was altered; tried again in a week's time, but would not answer. It afterwards was brought out at the Haymarket, in Elliston's hands, and is now one of the stock plays of the English stage.

Mr. Boaden was present on this unlucky night, and says it was plain that Kemble was suffering from illness, though he succeeded in stifling his coughing. But the question was whether he could not have exerted himself as he would have done had he been playing Pizarro or Coriolanus. Sir Walter Scott hints that the author had offended the player by inserting a passage on his black letter and antiquarian tastes, and

had actually called his hero *Philip* to make the satire apply. After this studied affront Colman could hardly expect much cordial support. Even without seeking any such ground as this, there was a sort of exalted oddity, if the phrase may be used, about Kemble which explains it, which might exhibit itself in a kind of passive antipathy to a part which he would accept loftily and never think of struggling against.

The best justification, however, of Colman's view, is that he repeated this sort of obstructive deportment on other occasions.* There was one night when a play of Godwin's was brought out, and where

* "Now, we confess," says Hazlitt, "he generally tries to do his best, and if that best is no better, it is not his fault. We think the fault was in the part, which wants circumstantial dignity. Give Mr. Kemble only the *man* to play, why, he is nothing; give him the paraphernalia of greatness, and he is great. He 'wears his heart in compliment extern.' He is the statue on the pedestal, that cannot come down without danger of shaming its worshippers; a figure that tells well with appropriate scenery and dresses, but not otherwise. Mr. Kemble contributes his own person to a tragedy, but only that. The poet must furnish all the rest, and make the other parts equally dignified and graceful, or Mr. Kemble will not help him out. He will not lend dignity to the mean, spirit to the familiar; he will not impart life and motion, passion and imagination, to all around him, for he has neither life nor motion, passion nor imagination, in himself. He minds only the conduct of his own person, and leaves the piece to shift for itself."

there was the same indisposition, the stifled cough, &c., and as no less a pleasant critic was present than Charles Lamb, it is worth while giving his amusing picture of the great actor :*—

"The story of his swallowing opium pills to keep him lively upon the first night of a certain tragedy, we may presume to be a piece of retaliatory pleasantry on the part of the suffering author. But, indeed, John had the art of diffusing a complacent equable dulness (which you knew not where to quarrel with) over a piece which he did not like, beyond any of his contemporaries. John Kemble had made up his mind early that all the good tragedies which could be written had been written; and he resented any new attempt. His shelves were full. The old standards were scope enough for his ambition. He ranged in them absolute; and 'fair in Otway, full in Shakspeare shone.' He succeeded to the old lawful thrones, and did not care to adventure bottomry with a Sir Edward Mortimer or any casual speculator that offered.

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* This sketch originally belonged to the paper on "The Artificial Comedy," but it was dropped out when the "Essays of Elia" were collected.

"I remember too acutely for my peace the deadly extinguisher which he put upon my friend G's. *Antonio.* G., satiate with visions of political justice (possibly not to be realized in our time) or willing to let the sceptical worldlings see that his anticipations of the future did not preclude a warm sympathy for men as they are and have been, wrote a tragedy. He chose a story, affecting, romantic, Spanish; the plot simple without being naked; the incidents uncommon without being overstrained. Antonio, who gives the name to the piece, is a sensitive young Castilian who, in a fit of his country's honour, immolates his sister. But I must not anticipate the catastrophe. The play, reader, is extant in choice English; and you will employ a spare half-crown not injudiciously in the quest of it. The conception was bold; and the *dénouement*, the time and place in which the hero of it existed considered, not much out of keeping; yet it must be confessed that it required a delicacy of handling, both from the author and the performer, so as not much to shock the prejudices of a modern English audience. G., in my opinion, had done his part; John, who was in familiar habits with the philosopher, had undertaken to play Antonio. Great expectations were formed. A philosopher's first play

was a new era. The night arrived. I was favoured with a seat in an advantageous box, between the author and his friend M. G. sat cheerful and confident. In his friend M.'s looks, who had perused the manuscript, I read some terror. Antonio, in the person of John Philip Kemble, at length appeared, starched out in a ruff which no one could dispute, and in most irreproachable moustaches. John always dressed most provokingly correct on these occasions. The first act swept by, solemn and silent. It went off, as G. assured M., exactly as the opening act of a piece—the protasis—should do. The cue of the spectators was to be mute. The characters were but in their introduction. The passions and the incidents would be developed hereafter. Applause hitherto would be impertinent. Silent attention was the effect all-desirable. Poor M. acquiesced; but in his honest friendly face I could discern a working which told how much more acceptable the plaudit of a single hand (however misplaced) would have been than all this reasoning. The second act (as in duty bound) rose a little in interest; but still John kept his forces under, in policy, as G. would have it, and the audience were most complacently attentive. The protasis in fact was scarcely unfolded. The interest would

warm in the next act, against which a special incident was provided. M. wiped his cheek, flushed with a friendly perspiration, 'tis M.'s way of showing his zeal, 'from every pore of him a perfume falls.' I honour it above Alexander's. He had once or twice during this act joined his palms in a feeble endeavour to elicit a sound; they emitted a solitary noise without an echo: there was no deep to answer to his deep. G. repeatedly begged him to be quiet. The third act at length brought on the scene which was to warm the piece progressively to the final flaming forth of the catastrophe. A philosophic calm settled upon the clear brow of G. as it approached. The lips of M. quivered. A challenge was held forth upon the stage, and there was promise of a fight. The pit roused themselves on this extraordinary occasion, and as their manner is, seemed disposed to make a ring; when suddenly Antonio, who was the challenged, turning the tables upon the hot challenger, Don Gusman (who, by the way, should have had his sister), balks his humour, and the pit's reasonable expectation at the same time, with some speeches out of the new philosophy against duelling. The audience were here fairly caught; their courage was up, and on the alert. A few blows, ding-dong, as R——s,

the dramatist, afterwards expressed it to me, might have done the business—when their most exquisite moral sense was suddenly called in to assist in the mortifying negation of their own pleasure. They could not applaud for disappointment; they would not condemn for morality's sake. The interest stood stone still; and John's manner was not at all calculated to unpetrify it. It was Christmas time, and the atmosphere furnished some pretext for asthmatic affections. One began to cough: his neighbour sympathized with him, till a cough became epidemical. But when, from being half artificial in the pit, the cough got frightfully naturalized among the fictitious persons of the drama, and Antonio himself (albeit it was not set down in the stage directions) seemed more intent upon relieving his own lungs than the distresses of the author and his friends, then G. 'first knew fear,' and, mildly turning to M., intimated that he had not been aware that Mr. Kemble laboured under a cold, and that the performance might possibly have been postponed with advantage for some nights further, still keeping the same serene countenance, while M. sweat like a bull. It would be invidious to pursue the fates of this ill-starred evening. In vain did the plot thicken in the scenes that followed; in

vain the dialogue was more passionate and stirring, and the progress of the sentiment point more and more clearly to the arduous development which impended. In vain the action was accelerated, while the acting stood still. From the beginning John had taken his stand—had wound himself up to an even tenor of stately declamation from which no exigence of dialogue or person could make him swerve for an instant. To dream of his rising with the scene (the common trick of tragedians) was preposterous; for from the outset he had planted himself, as upon a terrace, on an eminence vastly above the audience, and he kept that sublime level to the end. He looked from his throne of elevated sentiment upon the underworld of spectators with a most sovereign and becoming contempt. There was excellent pathos delivered out to them: an they would receive it, so: an they would not receive it, so. There was no offence against decorum in all this; nothing to condemn, to damn: not an irreverent symptom of a sound was to be heard. The procession of verbiage stalked on through four and five acts, no one venturing to predict what would come of it; when towards the winding-up of the latter, Antonio, with an irrelevancy that seemed to stagger Elvira herself—for she had been coolly arguing the point of honour with him—

suddenly whips out a poniard, and stabs his sister to the heart. The effect was as if a murder had been committed in cold blood. The whole house rose up in clamorous indignation, demanding justice. The feeling rose far above hisses. I believe at that instant if they could have got him they would have torn the unfortunate author to pieces. Not that the act itself was so exorbitant, or of a complexion different from what they themselves would have applauded upon another occasion, in a Brutus or an Appius; but for want of attending to Antonio's words, which palpably led to the expectation of no less dire an event, instead of being seduced by his manner, which seemed to promise a sleep of a less alarming nature than it was his cue to inflict upon Elvira, they found themselves betrayed into an accompliceship of murder, a perfect misprision of parricide, while they dreamed of nothing less. M., I believe, was the only person who suffered acutely from the failure; for G. thenceforward, with a serenity unattainable but by the true philosophy, abandoning a precarious popularity, retired into his fasthold of speculation—the drama in which the world was to be his tiring-room, and remote posterity his applauding spectators at once and actors."

Not until many years later were Colman and Kemble reconciled. The latter felt it due to his dignity to decline any advances, but at last yielded to the pressure of Lord Mulgrave and others. Colman and he became friends again, and the obnoxious history of the first night of the *Iron Chest* was suppressed.

But on yet another occasion he was to exhibit a new instance of this curious temper, when the bold imposture of *Vortigern* was put forward by the Irelands. This attempt has been a little too severely judged. We have at least some obligations to it for furnishing such wicked satire on the professional critics who, deeply skilled through a life-long study in the works of one who was "for all time," and who even approved or furiously debated whether these writings were from his hand. While the controversy raged Sheridan entered into a regular treaty with the fabricators, of course looking at the transaction from a purely commercial point of view. Kemble, too, without scruple, superintended the appointments, and took himself a leading character. But his private opinion was known to be that the piece was spurious. His sister also accepted a part; though, nearly a month before, she was writing to her friend, Mrs. Piozzi, in these terms:—"All sensible persons are convinced that

Vortigern is a most audacious impostor. If he be not, I can only say that Shakspeare's writings are more unequal than those of any other man. I am studying for *Vortigern* and *Almeyda;* and only scrawl these few lines for fear you should have been frightened at some story of my biting or barking."

She contrived to set herself free of the part: so she, at least, took no share in the imposture. However, as it could boast such advocates as Dr. Parr and others of the same class, it might have seemed good to submit to the arbitration of an audience, and even gratify public curiosity. A handsome arrangement was made with the proprietor of the supposed precious manuscript; and on the night of performance, April the 2nd, 1796, Drury Lane was crammed to the roof.

The scene was an extraordinary one. Ireland the father was present in a conspicuous box. A prologue by the manager's express desire asserted in plain terms the authorship of the play. But almost at once it became evident that the whole was mere verbiage, without action or "business"—a sense of weariness from the monotony settled on the audience, and Kemble again exhibited that strange lethargy of declamation to which he resigned himself willingly

when he found the task before him was about to be disagreeable. His manner was "freezing" throughout. Two veterans were alive in the year 1857 who had witnessed the curious scene.* They describe the extraordinary excitement—how the doors were blockaded for hours, and how, when they were opened, the pit was found to be already full of persons who had been privately admitted. The uproar and partisanship was indescribable. The "Malonites," whose leader had been vehement in exposing the gross imposture, calling out at particular passages "Henry the Sixth!" or some of Shakspeare's plays, from which they insinuated it had been copied. Kemble's behaviour, it must be said, was unfair and disloyal; and this Ireland's own account, as well as that of one of these witnesses, distinctly proves. As he delivered the line, "*And when this solemn mockery is o'er,*" he illustrated it with a sort of grimace and grotesque gesture, which produced a frightful yell from the pit; and as soon as something like silence was restored, he repeated the same line, in the same tone, and with the same illustration. This behaviour makes us incline to take the side of Colman in the *Iron*

* This account will be found in *Notes and Queries.*

Chest dispute, and of other victims whom Kemble treated much in the same fashion, excusing himself on the ground of illness, "taking opium pills," and the rest. Such behaviour was disloyal, and very different from that of Garrick in similar cases. After that night the spurious Shakspearian drama was never heard of.

By these rash experiments it will be seen that the management was scarcely consulting the dignity of their theatre. But behind the scenes the whole was in a state of utter disorganization. All sorts of rash experiments were tried. Kemble himself was even exhibited in an opera, and sang excruciatingly. Retirements were taking place. Mrs. Kemble, a pleasing actress, was withdrawn from the stage by her husband; and Bensley, one of the last few remnants of the old days, made his farewell, and retired to enjoy the charge of a barrack. But Kemble's own situation was growing unendurable. No money was to be obtained from Sheridan, and discreditable scenes, worthy only of a country theatre, were taking place behind the curtain of the classic Drury Lane. Actors and actresses would send word that they would not play that night unless their arrears of salary were paid up. The very upholsterers and drapers declined

to supply their wares on Mr. Sheridan's order; but it was a tribute to Kemble's good name, that they consented to do so if *he* gave them the guarantee of his word. His good nature and zeal for his office induced him to comply, and he was generally not allowed to suffer. But Sheridan once actually permitted him to be arrested through his own default; then the patience of the manager at last gave way, and perhaps welcomed an awkward accident, which presented him with an opportunity for withdrawing. After such an affront, he felt that his authority could have no weight, and he resigned. The proprietor, however, treated brother and sister impartially; and Mrs. Siddons, in her weary round through the country, makes bitter complaint of his treatment.

"Here I am, sitting close in a little dark room, in a little wretched inn, in a little poking village called Newport Pagnell. I am on my way to Manchester, where I am to act for a fortnight; from whence I am to be whirled to Liverpool, there to do the same. From thence I skim away to York and Leeds: and then, when Drury Lane opens—who can tell? for it depends upon Mr. Sheridan, who is uncertainty personified. *I have got no money from him yet;* and all my last benefit, a very great one, was swept into his treasury; nor have I

seen a shilling of it. Mr. Siddons has made an appointment to meet him to-day at Hammersley's. As I came away very early, I don't know the result of the conference; but unless things are settled to Mr. Siddons's satisfaction, he is determined to put the affair into his lawyer's hands."

It might have been expected that after such dishonest treatment she would have withdrawn from the theatre. But this would not have distressed Sheridan, who was now depending on quite a different order of attraction. He was besides degrading her by exhibiting her in wretched halting pieces. In one of these—Thomson's *Edward and Eleanora*—there was a tragic situation so ridiculous, where two babies in long clothes were brought in to their dying mother, that the house roared at the grand exertions of the actress. This was not the first occasion of such irreverence. Only a short time before Miss Burney had complied with the invitation given to her at Lady Cork's rout, and had written a piece for Mrs. Siddons. It must have been a most diverting performance, having *three* bishops for the heroes. The audience roared through it, from the moment the king said, loftily, "Bring in the bishop!" which was an ordinary tavern phrase. But the actress's dying

scene, when she was brought from behind a hedge "on an elegant sofa," caused convulsions of laughter.

She was again pursued by the old calumnies, and this combination of ill-fortune, failure of attraction, failure of salary, and slanders, was sufficient to justify the morbid tone of her spirits at this time. "One would think," she wrote, "I had already furnished conjectures and lies sufficient for public gossip; but now the people here begin again with me. They say that I am mad, and that *that* is the reason of my confinement. I should laugh at this rumour were it not for the sake of my children, to whom it may not be very advantageous to be supposed to inherit so dreadful a malady; and this consideration, I am almost ashamed to own, has made me seriously unhappy. However, I really believe I am in my sober senses, and most heartily do I now wish myself with you at dear Streatham, where I could, as usual, forget all the pains and torments of illness and the world. But I fear I have now no chance for such happiness."

This was probably another morbid delusion; for no reasonable person could for a moment suppose that she was insane.

The theatre was unlucky in other ways. A for-

tunate actress had captivated one of the leading noblemen of the country, Lord Derby, and in less than three weeks from his wife's death the marriage was arranged with an indecent haste that did not augur well for the happiness of the future. In those days the ladies of the stage might fairly count on such alliances; and the actresses of our time must put to the account of the decaying system they help to support, the loss of such brilliant chances. Kemble's quarrel with Colman had driven the latter to the other house, where he was producing such a capital and attractive comedy as the *Heir at Law*, while he later vamped up for Drury Lane such a spectacle as *Blue Beard*. Cumberland, too, was writing for the same theatre. But *sans* money, *sans* management, *sans* comedy, the improvident owner's luck was not to fail him, and the familiar *Castle Spectre*—dear to schoolboys—a supernatural drama of a most interesting sort, and which will always keep its hold upon a large class of playgoers, was to fill the treasury and stave off difficulty for the present. The secret of this success and of its permanent attraction, is that it was written with faith, and thus far represents a genuine feeling. The mind of "Monk" Lewis, its author, was charged with the wild and original legends of Ger-

many, then a novelty to England; and this strong impression colours every line of the drama. Putting it beside some of our modern attempts in the same direction, which have no such feeling to support them, we see the superiority of the older piece, which is full of colour, and, in spite of its ghostly atmosphere, excites our sympathy and interest. None of our "sensation" scenes—falling through bridges, being run over by railway trains—can be put beside the exciting escape of Percy through the tower window while the guards play dice: and the whole *mélange* of soft music, oratories, white-robed ghosts, and tyrant oppressors is excellently blended. This whetted the public taste for the German school of horror in its least disagreeable shape; but, by-and-by, the same source was to be heavily drawn on, for the lugubrious misery of Mrs. Haller and her gloomy spouse.

There was an association connected with the *Castle Spectre* not altogether so pleasant; the appearance of the dignified tragic actor in the poor melodramatic part of Percy, and he must have felt his position undignified, as the unbounded applause followed his agile scramble through the window of the dungeon. But he always professed to be what is called in the slang of the profession a general "utility actor," and

Boaden says, "would do anything."* His sister carried out the same principle. It seems incomprehensible; nor could the pressure of the management be urged as the chief reason. For it is well known, whatever be the force of agreements or stage custom, great performers cannot be dealt with according to any rigorous construction of their bonds; and Kemble and his sister could readily have withstood any pressure which would force them into parts unworthy of their dignity. But this easiness or indifference was exposing them to free criticism, to a fatal comparison with their greater selves, and invited a familiarity of treatment which was sure to tell upon their grander performances.

* "The *Castle Spectre* has at length appeared, and I write directly to give you my opinion of the incident mentioned in my last, which might be something like yours. The piece itself is very wild and fanciful, like the celebrated novel of its author. The plot and plan you will read in all the newspapers; the appearance of the Ghost at the end of the fourth and fifth acts had as great an effect upon the audience as anything I ever saw, producing a tumult of applause." Thus Mrs. Siddons wrote to her friend Whalley.

APPENDIX.

Account of Mrs. Siddons's engagement by Garrick, vol. i. p. 45.

IT would seem that Garrick was not satisfied with the report of his agent, King; but, in the month of August, 1775, sent down a second emissary to make further observation. This was the Rev. Mr. Bate, a clergyman of strong intelligence, vigorous style, and of a strength of muscle still more vigorous; for he could box and bruise and fight duels; write "slashing" articles, and was besides well up in stage matters. His letters containing the report of his little expedition are to be found in the British Museum, and are singularly interesting and vivacious.

After travelling along "some of the cursedest cross-roads in the kingdom," the clergyman arrived at Worcester, and there saw "the theatrical heroine" for the first time, playing Rosalind. He stood at the side wings of the theatre, which he described as a sort of barn; the stage about three yards wide. Yet under all these disadvantages he was enchanted with her playing, and at once pronounced that she would be a valuable addition to the ranks of Drury Lane.

She was, indeed, very close upon her confinement, but Mr. Bate was inclined to pronounce that, making all allowance for her condition, she had ordinarily a very fine figure. "Her face was one of the most strikingly beautiful for stage effect that I ever beheld; but I shall surprise you more when I assure you that these are nothing to her action and stage deportment, which are remarkably pleasing and characteristic.

In short, I know no woman who marks the different passages and transitions with so much variety, and, at the same time, propriety of expression. In the latter 'humbug' scene with Orlando she did more with it than any one I ever saw, not even your divine Mrs. Barry excepted." At first it seemed to him that her voice was "rather dissonant," and "somewhat grating in the unimpassioned scenes," but this wore away as the business became more interesting. "She is," goes on the clergyman, as you have been informed, "a very good breeches figure." She plays the Widow Brady, he is informed, admirably. "Nay, he should not be surprised if, from her ease of figure and manner, she made the proudest she of either house tremble *in genteel comedy*. Nay, beware yourself, great little man, for she plays Hamlet to the satisfaction of the Worcestershire critics."

Mr. Bate, it is evident, was quite captivated by her style, and he at once wrote a note to her husband, whom he describes as "a damned rascally player but a civil fellow," intimating his business. He begged that Garrick would not think him too precipitate; but in truth, he had heard that some Covent Garden emissaries were hanging about, and it was necessary to strike at once. Accordingly, after the farce was over, they both waited on him. He found them very humble, and willing to leave all and everything to Mr. Garrick, as indeed we might well imagine. He could discover in her all the diffidence that attends on merit, though of course how soon it might be corrupted by bad example at Drury Lane, "added to rising vanity," he could not say. She had been on the stage from her very cradle, "which," says Mr. Bate, "though it surprised me, gave me the highest opinion of her judgment to find she had contracted no strolling habits." The company was to return to Worcester for the race week, when he was to see her again.

Two days later—namely, on August 19, the agent wrote

again. The husband, Siddons, who seems to have been almost servile in his humility, only desired to be employed in any manner. He was more tolerable as an actor than Mr. Bate had thought at first. His young Marlow was far from despicable, neither was his figure or face contemptible. It was evident in short that he wished to be "thrown in" with his wife. "You can station him," says Mr. Bate, "so as to satisfy the man without burdening the property." But a suspicion of the negotiation had been whispered; the manager was surly at his players being decoyed away, and refused to let her appear; but Mr. Bate was determined to persevere.

She had given him a list of her characters, which ran—

Jane Shore.	Marianne.
Alicia.	*Lady Townly.*
Roxana.	*Portia.*
Grecian Daughter.	Mrs. Belville.
Matilda.	Violante.
Belvidera.	*Rosalind.*
Calista.	Mrs. Strickland.
Monimia.	Clarinda.
Juliet.	Miss Aubrey.
Cordelia.	Charlotte.
Horatia.	*Widow Brady.*
Imogen.	

The characters underlined were those she considered her strong ones, and in which she desired to appear. And it will be remarked how completely Garrick is vindicated by these letters from the charges of jealousy, trying to keep her back, &c. Bate wrote that "he *was strongly for her* making her first appearance in Rosalind," and his favourable report was founded on her playing in that comedy character. But in her list, out of thirteen tragedy characters she had marked only three, and those such second class ones as Alicia, the

Grecian Daughter, and Belvidera, making no mention of Lady Macbeth, Isabella, or Queen Katharine. Whereas out of her comedy characters, amounting to ten, she had marked no less than four, of which one was Portia, the character chosen for her *début*. It is perfectly plain that at this time her reputation was for comedy, and that on the strength of this reputation she was engaged for Drury Lane.

When Mr. Bate saw the pair again, all was arranged; but they submitted to Mr. Garrick some very modest requests, which they hoped he would be gracious enough to grant. 1st. As they were ready to attend him at any moment, would he not be pleased "to allow them something to subsist upon when they came to London previous to their appearance. 2nd. Whether he had any objection to employ *him* in any situation where he is likely to be useful." Mr. Bate urged warmly that their requests should be granted, "for," he says, "it would be unjust not to remark one circumstance in favour of them both. I *mean the universal good character they have possessed here for many years on account of their public as well as private conduct in life.*" They were anxious also to know "when it was his wish that they should attend him." "I beg you," urged their warm advocate, Mr. Bate, "to be very particular as to this, that they may arrange their little matters accordingly." She was also "the most extraordinary quick study imaginable."

Siddons appears through the transaction as a very poor and obsequious creature. He writes piteously to Bate about the delay, and his style corresponds. He had considered the matter concluded, and had given the manager notice, "so that if anything had happened and we had not been engaged it would have proved a very unlucky circumstance. However, sir, your letter hath removed my apprehensions and set me right again. I am very agreeable that Mrs. Siddons should be brought to bed in the country"—this delicate matter

having figured much in the negotiation, for Mr. Garrick wished to open the season with his new actress. A month later her husband was able to write to Mr. Garrick himself the joyful news, "You will be surprised when I tell you she was brought to bed, having been taken ill unexpectedly when performing on the stage, and early next morning produced me a fine girl. Both are doing well." He begs to be allowed to stay a little while, "for Mrs. Siddons counting so much longer than he had expected, he had left some private little matter undone. Most gratefully does he acknowledge Mr. Garrick's goodness, for he had just seen Mr. Dunwoody as Mr. S. had directed, and had made bold to take 20*l.*, which he hopes will meet his approbation."

They were duly engaged, but unluckily these delays prevented her appearance until the season had begun: another piece of ill luck in the transaction. The last letter in this interesting series is a dismal one. She had appeared at Drury Lane, and had failed, as we have seen. The news had spread of the change of proprietorship, and on February 9, 1776, Mr. Siddons writes a timorous appeal to Mr. Garrick. "I make bold," he wrote, "to trouble you with an epistle in which I venture to solicit your friendship and endeavours for our continuance at Drury Lane. *We* have been doubly unfortunate at our onset in the theatre. 1st, that particular circumstances prevented us from joining it at a proper time, and thereby rendered it impossible for *us* to be employed in the business of the season, when *our* utility might have been more observed." This complacency must have amused Garrick, as well as the husband's conceit of placing himself on a level with his gifted wife. I cannot find Mr. Siddons's name in any of the bills of the performances; so he must have been cast for some character scarcely rising above that of supernumerary. "2nd, that we are going to be deprived of you as manager, and going to be left to those who perhaps may not

have an opportunity this winter of observing us." There is a world of anxiety and suspense under these few lines, and it is evident that they had a sort of presentiment that they were about to be cast adrift. But here we seem to discover a trait of Mrs. Siddons's character. She herself, as has been pointed out in the text, ought to have applied to Garrick personally. She might have been too proud, or felt herself aggrieved by what she fancied was his unfair treatment. Or, what is not improbable, the conceit of her husband might have made him fancy that his application would carry far more weight. He begged of Garrick to get them this engagement. All they asked was a small sum, "no more than what I think we may decently subsist on, and appear with some credit to the profession—that is, 3*l.* for Mrs. Siddons, and 2*l.* for myself. This I flatter myself *we shall both* be found worthy of the first year; after that we shall wish to rise as *our merits* shall demand." Here was the same conceit. From this piteous demand we can imagine their despair when the fatal news of dismissal came.

END OF VOL. I.

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